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Auto-fiction: Fact or Fiction? A Psychoanalytical Study of Aron Ralston's *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

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Dedication 01

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala for His mercy, guidance, and strength, which helped me through every step of this journey, **El Hamd Lillah**.

I would like to dedicate this humble work to my parents,

To my mother, **Souhila,** your love is the foundation of everything I am. You are the heart of our home, the gentle hand that tapped on my back each time I felt unsure of what to do and guided me perfectly.

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رَحْمَةُ اللهِ عَ لَيك يا أبِي وَأسْكَنَك فَسِيحَ جَنَّاتِهِ

To my sisters, **Saida** my eldest, and **Roufaida,** whose graduating with me this year, those who say sisters are your first and forever friends, they were right. You never failed me. I will always be proud of such a family. Mom and Dad were right raising us perfectly.

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To the eyes that doubted me

To every invisible battle I had

To the weight I carried in silence

To ME, because I finally did it.

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Abstract

This research aims to tackle the interplay between fact and fiction in self-writing and autobiographical accounts in light of Aron Ralston's autobiographical novel *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (2004). Self-writing, as a literary genre, blurs the boundaries between objective truth and subjective interpretation, raising questions about the authenticity of personal narratives. Therefore, this study is an attempt to find answers to vital questions such as how memory and personal perspective shape the narrative? And can writers genuinely recount their personal experiences without alterations? Relying on Ralston's account of his harrowing experience, while trapped in a remote canyon and being reluctantly forced to take dire decisions to do the unthinkable, serves as a compelling case study for examining the construction of selfnarratives. Moreover, by means of a psychoanalytical approach, our paper shall tackle key notions and crucial theories such as Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory as well as Lacan's concepts of the self and subjectivity. Additionally, the study examines Ralston's use of storytelling techniques, such as vivid descriptions and emotional appeal, to balance factual accuracy with narrative creativity and reader engagement. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the dual nature of self-writing, where lived experience and creative storytelling coexist, contributing to the complexities of representing the self and reality in literature.

Key words:

Self-writing, Autobiographical accounts, Fact and fiction, Aron Ralston, Authenticity, Creativity.

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Introduction

The relationship between literature and psychology have been a subject of scholarly investigation, particularly where the boundaries between narrative and identity intersect. As both fields strive to understand human behavior, emotions, and subjectivity, their convergence becomes especially relevant in the context of trauma and self-representation. This dissertation explores the dynamic interplay between fact and fiction in self-writing, using Aron Ralston's memoir *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* as a case study. This autobiographical narrative recounts Ralston's traumatic experience of being trapped in a Utah canyon, where he ultimately had to amputate his own arm in order to survive. However, the memoir transcends its dramatic survival plot. It becomes a reflective narrative that investigates the deeper psychological and emotional journey of the self through suffering, memory, and recovery. More than a survival story, Ralston's account offers insight into the reconstruction of identity and the therapeutic function of storytelling, making it a valuable lens through which to examine how literature gives voice to trauma.

This research addresses the complex interplay between factual accuracy and imaginative reconstruction in autobiographical writing, particularly in the context of trauma. Traditional autobiography has long been grounded in the expectation of objective truth and chronological consistency. However, contemporary theorists contend that autobiographical narratives are inherently mediated by memory, a factual that is selective, emotionally influenced, and often fragmented. Trauma further complicates this dynamic by disrupting the continuity of time, identity, and language, frequently giving rise to disjointed or nonlinear narratives. Aron Ralston's memoir exemplifies these challenges and raises vital questions such as; In what ways do memory and subjective perspective influence the construction of autobiographical narratives? and to what extent can writers authentically recount personal experiences without narrative alteration or imaginative reconstruction?

This study aims to explore these questions through a close analysis of Ralston's narrative, investigating the psychological and literary mechanisms that enable trauma survivors to make sense of their experiences through writing.

This dissertation aims to make a scholarly contribution by examining how autofiction and trauma writing intersect a real-life narrative. Although much of the existing research on trauma focuses on fiction or war memoirs, less attention has been given to survival narratives such as Ralston's that fuse real events with reflective, symbolic language. Through an interdisciplinary approach that blends psychoanalytic theory, literary analysis, and trauma studies, this research highlights how traumatic experiences are not only described but reshaped in narrative form. By doing so, it fills a gap in academic discourse. Particularly in studies that either focus strictly on the truth-value of autobiographies or treat autofiction solely as fictional narrative. Ralston's memoir, which straddles both domains, challenges these boundaries and thus serves as a powerful text for examining how suffering, memory, and identity interact in the process of self-writing.

The methodology of this dissertation is based on a multidisciplinary approach that integrates psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and literary criticism. Drawing on Sigmund Freud`s model of the unconscious and his theory of trauma as a rupture in the mind's protective barrier, the study explores how repressed memories and emotional wounds emerge in Aron Ralston's narrative. Jaqcues Lacan's concepts of the Real and the Mirror Stage are used to examine how trauma disrupts identity and how the self-attempts to reconstruct itself through symbolic encounters. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, which emphasizes the human capacity to find meaning in suffering, adds an existential perspective to the analysis. The study also incorporates Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, particularly her ideas of belated understanding and repetition, as well as Joseph Campbel's monomyth framework to situate Ralston's journey within a universal pattern of crisis, transformation, and return. These theories are

applied through close textual analysis, with careful attention to narrative structure, language, symbolism, and the psychological dimensions of Ralston's self-representation.

This dissertation is structured into three main chapters, each of which builds upon the last to develop a comprehensive understanding of how trauma affects identity and how writing serves as a form of psychological reconstruction. The first chapter establishes the theoretical foundation of the dissertation by examining key concepts from psychoanalysis, autobiography, and autofiction. It begins with a historical overview of psychoanalytic thought, tracing its development from the foundational ideas of Freud and Jung to the more complex structural theories of Lacan and the deconstructive insights of Derrida. The chapter then explores the historical development and definition of autobiography and autofiction, highlighting how writers navigate the boundaries between factual and fictional self-representation in literary works. The third section examines the intersection between psychoanalysis and autofiction, considering how psychoanalytic concepts can be applied to analyze the blending of reality and imagination in self-writing. Finally, the fourth section discusses Aristotle`s concepts of Mimesis, exploring the interplay between fact and fiction, and questioning the extent to which literature can authentically represent reality. Together, these sections can lay a theoretical foundation for understanding how self-writing serves as a means of articulating identity and life experiences.

The second chapter, entitled as; Self-Exploration Through Autofiction in Between a Rock and a Hard Place, shifts from theory to textual analysis. It opens with an account of Ralston's entrapment in Blue John Canyon, which serves as the narrative`s point of rupture. This chapter is divided into four main parts. The first examines the incident itself and its symbolic implications as a moment of existential crisis. The second section explores Ralston's descent into trauma, loss, and disorientation, drawing on the works of Caruth, Freud, and Judith Herman to explain how trauma disrupts both perception and identity. The third section focuses on the role of memory in sustaining hope and

reconstructing a sense of self, using insights from Endel Tulving, Daniel Schacter, and Jerome Bruner. Finally, the fourth section discusses the act of self-amputation not just as a literal escape from death but as a symbolic moment of rebirth, using Campbell's hero's journey and Tedeschi and Calhoun's theory of post-traumatic growth. Together, these sections reveal the multi-layered nature of Rlaston's narrative as both factual testimony and psychological exploration.

The third chapter, turns attention to the aftermath of trauma and the process of identity reconstruction. The first section of this chapter addresses the lingering effects of trauma on Ralston's psyche, highlighting the internal struggles that persist even after physical recovery. The second section analyzes how Ralston redefines himself through a newfound sense of purpose, autonomy, and relational awareness, interpreting his transformation through Lacan's concept of the Real and Frankl's existential therapy. The third section looks at how the act of writing itself becomes therapeutic. Drawing on James Pennabaker's research into expressive writing and Donald Murray's theories of discovery through writing, this section shows how Ralston reshapes his fragmented experiences into a coherent narrative. The final section examines whether autofiction serves as a genuine therapeutic tool or merely hides deeper emotional wounds behind a well-structured story. In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Aron Ralston shows that autofiction can be a powerful way to heal. By combining real events with personal reflection, Ralston uses writing to face his trauma, understand it, and give it meaning. His narrative helps him rebuild his identity and find new purpose in life. Therefore, for Ralston, autofiction acts as a tool for self-discovery and psychological recovery.

In terms of previous research, many scholars have explored the themes of trauma and selfrepresentation in literary fiction, particularly in the context of war literature, exile narratives, or abuse memoirs. However, relatively little attention has been paid to autobiographical survival

narratives grounded in extreme physical trauma, especially through a psychoanalytic and auto fictional lens.

Much of the scholarly discourse remains divided between those who treat autobiography as a factual record and those who explore autofiction as a post-modern literary device. This dissertation bridges that divide by treating Ralston's memoir as both a true account of survival and a symbolic re-imagining of identity. In doing so, it sheds light on the ways in which trauma resists representation while also demonstrating how narrative form allows survivors to give shape, meaning, and coherence to their fragmented experiences.

In conclusion, this thesis reaffirms the powerful and transformative role of self-writing. Ralston's narrative is not merely a story of physical endurance, but a deep and complex journey through psychological rupture and rebirth. Through the act of writing, Ralston engages directly with his loss, reassesses his core values, and reconstructs an identity grounded in vulnerability, resilience, and existential meaning. This dissertation underscores the role of autobiographical literature, particularly when examined through the framework of psychoanalysis and trauma theory, as both a reflective surface and a navigational tool, it mirrors the psychological landscape of the subject while simultaneously guiding the trajectory of recovery. By integrating theoretical insights with lived experience, and blending factual narration with imaginative reconstruction, this study offers a nuanced perspective on the transformative potential of narrative to heal, reformulate and reconstruct the self in the aftermath of trauma.

Chapter I: Laying the Theoretical Foundation

This chapter establishes a theoretical framework for examining self-writing by incorporating concepts from psychoanalysis, autobiography, and autofiction. The first part of the current chapter examines the history and key concepts of psychoanalysis, dealing with significant figures like Freud, Lacan and others. Their insights into the unconscious and identity illuminate how individuals' internal thoughts and feelings shape their narratives. The second part presents the historical background as well as the definition of very important concepts such as autobiography and autofiction, and self-representation in literary works. The third part focuses on the intersection between psychoanalysis and autofiction, showing how psychoanalytic ideas, such as repression, desire, and the divided self, can help us understand the way autofiction brings together truth and imagination. Eventually, the final part aims to clarify the interplay between Fact and Fiction, by discussing Aristotle's concept of Mimesis, or imitation, which explores the question of whether art and literature truly represents reality? Hense, this chapter seeks to provide a thorough understanding of how writers can express their own identities and life experiences throughout their works.

I.1 Overview of psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is the most recent and advanced therapeutic approach originally developed by Sigmund Freud. It aims at treating neuroses by analyzing the unconscious mind. Unlike other methods that merely tackle superficial problems, psychoanalysis seeks to uncover the hidden and often repressed causes behind these complex psychological problems. Freud suggests that these underlying issues often originate from unresolved childhood experiences and unmet desires, which continue to subtly influence adult behavior (Freud 348). The main idea of psychoanalysis is that by bringing these unconscious conflicts into awareness, individuals can better understand the roots of

their emotional pain and start the healing process. Thus, psychoanalysis acts not just as a diagnostic method but also as a therapeutic journey of self-exploration. According to Isador H. Coriat American psychiatrist and neurologist, psychoanalysis helps to uncover the unconscious drives and repressed desires that underpin the symptoms, facilitating their exploration and resolution within the therapeutic process.

Hense, in light of Coriat's view, one might argue that not only does psychoanalysis enable us to identify the origins of psychological distress and traumas but it also promotes a healthier and more balanced state of mind (42).

Accordingly, when examining the historical development of psychoanalysis, it is essential to acknowledge several key figures who significantly contribute to its evolution before Sigmund Freud. When looking at how psychoanalysis has developed over time. One of them is Franz Anton Mesmer, who works with ideas like Animal Magnetism, which means is the idea that living beings have an invisible natural energy. Mesmer believed this energy could be moved or balanced using magnets or hand movements to heal people ("Franz Anton Mesmer"). Then there is the Nancy School, which focuses on using suggestion and hypnosis as ways to treat people, especially through the work of Liébeault and Bernheim ("Nancy School"). Another important figure is Jean-Martin Charcot, who uses hypnosis to study hysteria and its causes (Charcot 1879). Finally, Josef Breuer plays a big role by creating the cathartic method, which helps patients express and release their hidden emotions (Breuer and Freud 1895). All of these early thinkers have managed to build the foundation for what later becomes Freudian psychoanalysis.

Freud (1900) says that the mind has two parts (a two-part model), separating the unconscious, which is a repository of repressed childhood wishes that work in illogical ways, from the preconsciousconscious, which controls logical thoughts and planned behaviors (Habicht 3–4). In this

model, the unconscious is separated from the preconscious and also the conscious, with each part having a different role in how people think and act.

Freud introduces the structural model of personality, which is called the tripartite model of the psyche. It encompasses the Id, Ego, and the Superego. Bringing the three parts together, Seligman describes Freud's perspective on a healthy personality as one that maintains a balanced interaction among three main components: the Id, which represents biological urges; the Ego, which involves psychological processes; and the Superego, which encompasses social and moral influences. She also refers to Freud's framework as "a kind of map" for grasping the structure of personality. She goes on to comment that "in reality, they operate together as the internal forces that form our personalities", which means that in reality the Id, Ego, and the Superego work together as interconnected elements that collectively shape personality (Seligman 50).

Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) is a groundbreaking work that shows how dreams have deep psychological impact and meaning and that they are not just images but have hidden messages (Spessoto 53). Sigmund Freud proposes every dream has two main parts. The first part is called manifest content, which is what we remember and experience in the dream. It's straightforward and easy to understand. The second is latent content, which represents the deeper, hidden significance of the dream. This part is not obvious and is often connected to our genuine emotions, fears, and desires. Freud believed that dreams are important because they reveal our real thoughts and emotions, but they don't show everything clearly. Instead, they often hide the real message behind symbols or confusing images. Therefore, dreams can be both useful and puzzling, as they try to communicate something important while hiding their true meaning (Marcus 1999).

Furthermore, literature, as well as mythology, is not only an object of inquiry but also a fundamental source of knowledge for psychoanalysis. In fact, according to De Giorgio,

psychoanalytic knowledge swings not only between natural sciences and human or social sciences, but also between theoretical and poetical speculation. It is a matter of fact that literature always makes an important contribution to the understanding of the deepest parts of the human mind. Sigmund Freud argues that psychoanalysts probably refer to the same sources and work on the same object as writers and other artists. He also adds that the convergence of results seems to guarantee the correctness and the validity of the work carried out by psychoanalysts and artists (De Giorgio).

The interplay between psychoanalysis and literature reveals a profound relationship where each discipline enriches the understanding of the other. Psychoanalysis influences numerous fields, including cultural studies, sociology, criminal law, literary criticism, political theory, and art interpretation. But psychoanalysis does not find its reflection anywhere as clearly as in the works of writers and poets. Freudian concepts are significantly discussed in foreign and domestic research, with many scholars writing about psychoanalysis in the humanities. These theories are particularly useful in literature, where Freud's writing on creativity, artistic imagination, and the interaction between form and content is utilized. Freud regards psychoanalysis as a way of reading literature and makes wide use of literary works in his own texts. His followers go on to investigate the connection between psychoanalysis and literature further ("*Collected Papers*"*1959*).

On the other hand, while Freud is concerned with the process of creativity and the ego, Jung introduces into the equation archetypes; those shared symbols that exist in literature. Literature reflects psychological phenomena, explains complex human emotions and thought processes, and psychology enhances the knowledge of literary personalities and themes (Shahnaz 36-41). Psychoanalytic methods, such as free association and dream analysis, are applied in literature to analyze unconscious materials in texts, revealing hidden pathologies and neuroses (Chernysh et al 2021). Furthermore, the analysis of psychoanalytic processes within literature, such as transference and therapeutic change, gives rise to new knowledge about reality and character development,

demonstrating the lively interaction between these fields (Enckell 5-6). Not only does this blending of disciplines advance literary criticism, but it also enriches psychological theory and practice (Gurnham & Psarras 2025).

Similarly, psychoanalysis has a significant impact on literature, mainly through important ideas like the unconscious mind, repression, and creativity. Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking work in psychoanalysis (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 1900) in the early 20th Century, changes how we understand the human mind and greatly influence both psychology and literature. Freud's study of the unconscious mind, his methods of dream analysis, and his concepts of the id, ego, and superego offer authors a fresh perspective to go deeper into intricate psychological themes in their writings. This influence is evident in literary genres like modernism and surrealism, where narrative structures and character development often reflect psychoanalytic ideas (Toshtemorovish 131).

The interplay between psychoanalysis and literature is mutual, as Literature plays a significant role in shaping psychoanalytic ideas by offering valuable content for analysis, which helps in the creation of psychological theories and terms (Hasan & Ghareeb 2019). Freud himself often links his own works to literature, highlighting the similarities between the two, suggesting that literature, like psychoanalysis, reshapes or organizes reality in a way that makes it easier to understand.

Literature helps people understand the mind and characters better by revealing the complexities of human consciousness through various narrative techniques. It shows how a character's focus shifts from their immediate environment to memories or imaginations. By exploring different parts of the mind; from basic feelings to complex thoughts expressed in words, literature also shows the details of how we think and feel. Furthermore, studying translations of literary works further illuminates preverbal organization, enhancing our comprehension of mental processes (Rundquist 127-130).

Literary works, especially novels, improves people's understanding of the characters' minds by engaging their "Theory of Mind" (Walser 2022). Which allows them to perceive the mental states of others. However, as discussed in *Writing the Mind*, numerous American novels from the nineteenth century feature characters whose actions are unclear, complicating understanding based only on their beliefs and intentions. This complexity invites readers to explore alternative frameworks for understanding behavior, ultimately enriching people's comprehension of social cognition and the intricacies of human interactions (Walser 2022). Martín Azar, on the other hand, adds that literature tests the mind by encouraging readers to imagine the thoughts and emotions of different characters all at once, which helps enhance their understanding of various viewpoints (Azar 2019).

I.1.1 Psychoanalysis After Freud

The concept of Analytical psychology was introduced by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, initially a student of Sigmund Freud, while Analytical Psychology has originated as a branch of psychoanalysis, it has also evolved into a concept of depth psychology and trans-personal psychology, which was originally used by Jung. Depth psychology is in between psycho-dynamic and humanistic theories, while trans-personal psychology focuses more on humanistic, spiritual and metaphysical perspectives (Slattery&Corbett 2004). The idea of Archetypes comes from the observation that myths and fairy-tales from different cultures share common themes. These same themes also appear in people's dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations. These images and ideas are referred to as Archetypal ideas. Additionally, the ideas of archetypes and the collective unconscious are among professor Jung's well-known theories, they were introduced in his early work, on *the psychology and Pathology* of so called "Occult Phenomena" (1902), where he studied the fantasies of a woman with Hysteria. Overtime, he has developed and refined these concepts, ultimately creating a complete theory (Jung 1968).

Furthermore, adding how Jung and Freud's ideas differ from each other, Jung has criticized Freud's emphasis on sexuality and the unconscious, proposing a broader view of the psyche that included collective unconscious and archetypes. Their different perspectives on human motivation and the nature of dreams mark a significant divergence in psychoanalytic theory. According to Jung, the self is essential and comes before the ego. While Freud views the self as a consequence of how the ego develops, Jung highlights the self as an active and purposeful force, which differs from Freud's focus on structure ("Individuation" 135).

Carl Jung and Alfred Adler both have provided alternatives to Freud's psychoanalysis, but Adler took a unique approach by focusing on individual psychology and the influence of social factors on personality growth. Unlike Freud, who has emphasized unconscious conflicts and sexual drives, Adler argued that the primary motivation in life is the urge to overcome feelings of inferiority. He introduced the idea of the inferiority complex, explaining how people seek superiority in response to early difficulties. Adler also had a more positive view of the unconscious, seeing it as a source of creativity and problem-solving, highlighting the significance of social interest and community support in therapy. Overall, while both Adler and Freud recognized the unconscious, their views and therapeutic aims were quite different.

Jacques Lacan, who is also known as The French Freud. He built on Sigmund Freud's ideas but added new ways of thinking, especially using language and philosophy. Lacan argues that the unconscious is structured like a language with rules and hidden meanings. He also added that our identity is shaped by three important parts: The Imaginary, The Symbolic and The Real. Jacques Lacan's representation of the Mirror stage theory at the 1936 became an important point of his theoretical framework, explaining how the ego develops through connection with an outside image, Lacan's intellectual journey can be divided into three important phases, which are: the Imaginary (1930- 1940), the Symbolic (1950), the Real (1960-1970). According to Forsyth the Imaginary is

about images, identity, and how we see ourselves and others. It begins with the Mirror stage, where a child sees his reflection and develops a sense of self from that Image, even if it is not entirely accurate. The Symbolic relates to language, rules, and shared meanings in society. It influences our thoughts, desires, and unconscious mind. The Real, on the other hand, is what cannot be expressed or fully grasped, it lies outside of language and images, often associated with trauma or experiences that don't align with our usual perceptions. It contrasts with reality, representing what is difficult to articulate or illustrate (Forsyth 3-5).

Lacan's contribution in reshaping our view of the unconscious by connecting it to language, his ideas have the light on at what human existence means which was something that Martin Heidegger was so interested in. Martin Heidegger was openly critical of psychoanalysis. But his ideas connect with psychoanalysis especially in how he questioned the scientific way of explaining human behavior. As explained by Richardson, Dantas & Ribeiro, in his seminars, Heidegger collaborated with psychoanalysts, especially Medard Boss, to challenge Freud's positivist perspective (Dantas & Ribeiro 8). He argues that that the concept of the unconscious, as proposed by Freud, is unnecessary when understanding human existence through the concept of Dasein, or being in-the-world. This existential analytic, rooted in Heidegger's *being and tim*e book, focuses more on understanding people's experiences instead of just explaining their behavior through causal relationships (Roehe 2012). Furthermore, Lacan's reinterpretation of the unconscious as a linguistic construct resonates with Heidegger's philosophy since both have encouraged psychoanalysts to look deeper into what it means to be human, rather than just following traditional psychological methods (Richardson 2003).

Heidegger focuses on the concept of being and people's relationship with the world, Poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida begins to challenge the very notion of stable meaning and identity. Derrida, through his deconstruction theory, questions the separations and the deep ideas that exist in language and writing, including those that are essential, important, and crucial to

psychoanalytic and philosophical thought. The term “deconstruction” is derived from the French verb *déconstruire*, which means “to reverse the progress of” or “to take apart”. In philosophical discourse, it is introduced by Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s as a reaction to Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) concept of *destruktion*, a German word that translates to “destruction” or “de-building”. Therefore, “deconstruction” is historically linked to Heidegger’s work. Instead of using Heidegger`s term for textual analysis, Derrida prefers “deconstruction”. Since then, this term has become a significant part of philosophical, literary, and political language, although it has earlier applications in grammar and architecture (Sikirivwa 44).

Sikirivwa also contends that deconstruction should not be mistaken for “deconstructionism”, which refers to the effort to discuss God within the framework of our secular, relativistic, postmodern culture in a manner that is not theological (Sikirivwa 45). Originating from the work of Derrida, deconstruction draws inspiration from what Heidegger describes as the “destruction” of philosophical traditions. Derrida aims to apply deconstruction to the interpretation of texts, as opposed to Heidegger`s notion of “destruction”, which pertains to examining the categories and concepts that tradition imposes on a word, along with their historical context (Sikirivwa 45).

In Derrida’s perspective, deconstruction is neither a philosophy, nor a doctrine, nor a method, nor a discipline, but “only what happens if it happens” (qtd.in Thomassen). For Derrida, deconstruction is not a singular concept; instead, it encompasses multiple forms of deconstruction. It is inherently diverse, and each application of deconstruction cannot be confined to an existing definition. As quoted, “deconstruction is not a fixed method you can apply like a tool. It changes depending on how it’s used and only exists through those uses”. So, it is not something that is stable, it reshapes each time it is used (Thomassen 51).

I.2 Writing the Self: The Diverging Paths of Autobiography and Autofiction

Autobiography is the process of writing one's own life story. It is subjective in nature, reflecting an individual's unique and personal experience as written autobiographies gives insight into the way individuals define themselves and understand their own experiences. Memory, identity, and life events are the pillars of reason in autobiographical subjectivity (Reece 2). Smith and Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* gives a full explanation of Autobiography from the starting point, in the late 18th century autobiographies were formally recognized as a literary genre, yet its origins go back to antiquity, where it overlaps with a number of kinds of life writing, such as letters, diaries, and memoirs. St.Augustine's Confessions (c. 397–400 CE) has played a pivotal role in influencing this long tradition of autobiographical writings, which has experienced many changes over various cultures and periods. This foundational work has been so influential in the conceptual framework of autobiography in the Renaissance in Europe that it has enabled it to evolve as a modern literary genre fostering the concept of a universal white man who reflects on his unique life, narrating the moments that shape his identity and completeness.

Then they continue explaining, autobiographies of prominent individuals who have shaped the literary canon are rooted in autonomy, self-realization, authenticity, and transcendence principles. Their organization is usually in a developmental narrative, characterized by clear self-awareness and authorial motivation toward an ultimate objective, whether religious or political, then in the context of modernity, the evolution of autobiography is influenced by factors such as class, race, and gender privilege insofar as it enables the surfacing of marginalized voices and counter-narratives in the form of feminist, working-class, and postcolonial inquiries (Smith and Watson). The term autobiography is a complex word due to the fact that it has rich, diverse and complex histories that demand more than one disciplinary classification, genre definition, and literary analysis. Within this context, Philippe

Lejeune`s definition has been an originating reference point, fostering continued discussion. Whereby Lejeune has revisited and extended his ideas throughout the years: “a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person, concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (Lejeune 4). He defines Autobiography as a narrative told in prose and written by the person whose life is being described, simply the main subject of the story is the author’s own life. While commenting on the masculine grammatical pronouns and the uncertain boundaries between autobiography and other forms of life writing or fiction, Lejeune emphasizes a fundamental tripartite relationship that he finds inherent in autobiography “the author, the narrator and the protagonist must be identical” (Lejeune 5). To convey this tripartite relationship in the writing, Lejeune introduced the idea of autobiographical pact which is an implicit contract between writers and readers that the autobiographical work presents actual events and actual individuals, for him autobiography is delineated by describing it not only as a genre of writing but, more importantly, as a reading mode, which he describes as a contract effect that has varied over time but autobiographical history, then, is most appropriately conceived of as “a history of its mode of reading” (Lejeune 30), by theorizing autobiographies as reading modes and not merely writing, new epistemic possibilities for interpreting them are opened up. From this basis in truth and memory, autofiction takes a step further, blending reality with fiction to reimagine the self (Tamboukou 3).

The term “autofiction” was first used by Serge Doubrovsky, to whom it was applied to his novel *Fils* of 1977. He provides it with a broad definition, referring to it as “Fiction based on entirely real facts and events; in other words, autofiction” (qtd.in Saunders 763). The term has been extended to other current literary works that merge autobiographical elements with fictional narratives. A broader application refers to its use in Anglicized spelling, termed "autofiction", which indicates the growing importance of these hybrid literary genres in English literature (Saunders 763). Armine Mortimer asserts that “Autofiction is center stage now and is showing no indication of relinquishing its

ostentatious precedence, both among creative writers and critical and interpretive theorists" (Mortimer 22). Autofiction has received significant scholarly attention in the field of twenty-first-century literary theory, especially with regards to debate about late twentieth-century postmodern fiction. Yet there has been renewed attention given to early twentieth-century modernist prose, which is seen as a starting point for postmodern autofiction today and this shift is largely beneficial, in Saunders`s work the focus is on different hybrid forms from the modernist era and the late 19th to early 20th century, specifically from 1870 to 1930 (Saunders 763).

Understanding autofiction requires identifying the narrative and thematic elements that constitute its form, the tension inherent in autobiography mostly due to the uncertainty in separating fact and fiction. Some sections may be verifiable upon further examination, but others could be unclear or even impossible for readers to differentiate, so they would speculate. In an article in 2014, Jonathon Sturgeon points out a characteristic that marks postmodern autofiction, as opposed to high postmodernism, which dwelled on "hyperreality or unreality" (Sturgeon 2014). Autofiction considers the relationship between reality and narrative within the scope of our everyday lives. He contends that in autofiction, the self is viewed as a dynamic entity formed from narratives and realities (Bansal 2024). Though the concept takes from ideas born during the 1970s, Sturgeon notes that previous works were characterized by a tension between fact and fiction; however, recent autofiction avoids this tension, instead concentrating on "how to live or how to create" (Sturgeon 2014).

Autofiction has a strong connection to the author's life, not merely using shared character names, the main character often reflects the author`s experiences, especially in how writing impacts their life. Often, the main character is a writer, and some autofiction can be classified as autobiographical metafiction, focusing on the challenges of writing and narrative development, while Scholars have observed that autofiction aligns closely with the German idea of Künstlerroman, as both genres explore the personal writing paths of authors. Autofiction creates a self-based on real experiences,

creative ideas, and fictional narratives. Moreover, this type of writing offers a protective layer for writers who want to tackle sensitive topics or keep their private lives safe (Bansal 2024).

I.2.1 Understanding the Relationship Between Autobiography and Autofiction in Life Narratives

The connection between autobiography and autofiction in personal narratives is a complex and ongoing dialogue that questions the strict boundaries between truth and fiction, history and creativity, memory and narrative form. As Missinne notes in her discussion of the "autobiographical pact", the traditional understanding of autobiography is founded on a contract between reader and writer, where the author, narrator, and protagonist are the same person sharing the same identity, and the text implicitly promises a truthful recounting of events (Missine 222). However, as scholars have increasingly shown, that this type of pact is a narrative approach, not an ontological guarantee of factuality. Autobiographical writings involve the work of interpreting and constructing a cohesive life story, often under the constraints of genre expectations, cultural norms, and narrative reasoning (Löschnigg 103). Autofiction emerges as a significant response to these constraints and ambiguities, clearly highlighting the blurred lines separating fiction from non-fiction. Coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, the term autofiction refers to narratives that, while marked by autobiographical features, such as the identical name of the author and protagonist, simultaneously embrace fictional techniques and invented elements (Gronemann 241).

Autofiction challenges the stability of the autobiographical pact by engaging the reader in a realm of narrative ambiguity. As Gronemann explains, the autofictional narrative does not dismiss autobiographical references, instead problematizing it through the use of dissimulation, irony, and performativity that challenge the stability of identity and the clarity of narrative (Gronemann 243). This conflict between referential and fictional styles highlights broader epistemological questions

about the nature of identity and the reliability of memory. Narrating one's life goes beyond simply recalling events, it is about reshaping experiences with language, a process that naturally includes gaps, enhancements, and interpretive acts. The identity formed in both autobiography and autofiction is thus not a stable essence but a dynamic identity influenced by discourse. As Schmitt argues in his chapter on self-narration, the self is shaped in and through narrative, which serves as both a means of selfexploration and a site for identity construction (Schmitt 658). This construction is both personal and cultural, where identity becomes a narrative shaped by social discourse and literary conventions.

Autofiction reveals the tension between lived experience and storytelling, portraying the self as constructed, fragmented, and continually redefined. Memory plays a crucial role in this narrative dynamic, as Schaser observes in her discussion of memory in autobiographical writing, memory is not simply a passive storage of facts, it is an active, reconstructive process that is influenced by contemporary perspectives, emotions, and cultural scripts (Schaser 342). In both autobiography and autofiction, memory is not a reliable record but a tool for shaping meaning, rather than delivering absolute truth, both genres are characterized by interpretation and selective reconstruction. Autofiction builds on this by using fiction to explore emotional depth, subjective experience, and psychological complexity. The blending of autobiography and autofiction is especially significant in contexts of trauma, illness, and marginalization, where the self can be fragmented or destabilized. Holdenried points out that in trauma narratives, traditional autobiographical coherence often breaks down, and writers turn to autofictional forms to convey the inexpressible, non-linear, or dissociative nature of traumatic memory (Holdenried 423), which shows that autofiction provides a flexible literary form that helps authors express traumatic experiences that may be too difficult to express in traditional autobiography and it also creates opportunities for writers with marginalized identities, including queer, diasporic, or ill individuals, to challenge dominant cultural narratives, by combining

personal truth with symbolic and creative elements, autofiction allows for more complex and inclusive selfrepresentation.

The impact of media and digital technologies has further reshaped life narratives, intensifying the interplay between autobiography and autofiction. As Kreknin discusses in his analysis of digital autobiographies, the rise of blogs, social media platforms, and online life-writing tools has introduced new forms of narrative self-construction, where the distinction between real and fictional selves is becoming less clear (Kreknin 557), meaning that in digital spaces, people blend real and fictional elements to perform their identities. This everyday autofiction shows how autobiography and autofiction merge in response to media-driven, postmodern views of the self. Furthermore, the philosophical implications of autofiction extend into ethical and political realms. As Schmitt notes, the emphasis on experientiality and embodiment in contemporary autobiography underscores the material and affective dimensions of self-writing, calling attention to the ways in which bodies, emotions, and social identities are inscribed in narrative (Schmitt 658–660), Autofiction highlights the fiction in life stories without denying their truth, instead treating truth as a creative and ethical way to explore identity and social issues. Writers like Hervé Guibert and Christine Angot use autofiction to confront stigma and break taboos, turning it into a powerful tool for political expression and reclaiming agency.

Consequently, the difference between autobiography and autofiction is better seen as a flexible and shifting line rather than a fixed boundary. In many modern life stories, writers often move between telling true events and using imagination to shape their narratives. This mix shows that self-writing is always influenced by real experiences, personal memories, and the creative way a story is told. It highlights how personal identity in writing is not simple or fixed, but built through a combination of truth and imagination.

I.3 Understanding Psychoanalysis and Autofiction

Psychoanalysis serves as a theory about how the mind works, a method for exploring its contents, and a form of therapy aimed at improving those contents for a happier and more fulfilling life. It highlights the significance of unconscious processes, internal conflicts, defense mechanisms, and deeper meanings. Childhood experiences and relationships with oneself and others are crucial for understanding personality. While Sigmund Freud has originally developed classical psychoanalysis, many modern theories and therapies have emerged from his ideas, including ego psychology, object relations, and existential and relational psychotherapies. Recent developments include attachmentfocused therapy and intensive short-term psycho-dynamic therapy (Kenny 1). Psychoanalysis is possibly the most cited, criticized and misunderstood psychological theories that have ever populated the psychological literature. The word "Psychoanalysis" is invariably associated with terms such as the Oedipus complex, castraction anxiety, id, ego, superego, defence and the unconscious (Kenny 1).

Autofiction, a term introduced by Serge Doubrovsky in the 1970s, is a unique genre that blends autobiographical elements with fictional storytelling, often featuring the author as a character in their own narrative. This genre is the subject of much scholarly debate regarding its classification, whether it is a standalone genre or a type of autobiography. Autofiction often presents two layers of narrative, encouraging readers to think critically about their interpretation, as the boundary between reality and fiction becomes blurry. This results in what Gibbons refers to as "ontological dissonance", which is a sense of doubt regarding what is real and what is imagined (Gibbons 2022). The genre also addresses themes such as trauma and identity, particularly in postcolonial contexts, where writers recount narratives of past injustices related to their familial backgrounds. Since writers often mix personal truths with fictional elements, autofiction can occasionally lead to controversy (Jacobi 2021). After

all, autofiction challenges conventional storytelling norms and reshapes reader expectations, allowing for a compelling blend of individual and shared narratives (León 2021).

I.3.1 The Intersection of Psychoanalysis and Autofiction

The connection between psychoanalysis and autofiction is often complicated, yet it shows an interesting overlap in how both deal with personal identity, language, and emotional pain. According to Doubrovsky, Autofiction is considered as a “mirror text” because it reflects the writer’s real life while also changing it (Milesi 195). In simpler terms, Autofiction alows writers to tell their stories in a more fictionalized framework, enabling them to understand their true identities. Hence, one might argue that autofition seems to resonate with psychoanalysis, which aims to understand a person’s inner world by looking at their memories, thoughts, and feelings. However, autofiction doesn’t always agree with psychoanalysis. It often challenges the idea that our identity is mostly shaped by hidden, unconscious forces. Instead, autofiction gives more power to the writer’s voice, allowing them to take control of their story and change how they perceive themselves and their past.

Studying psychoanalysis and autofiction together is important because both deal with the hidden intricacies of identity. Autofiction, which mixes autobiography and fiction, questions traditional ideas of authorship and truth by showing a version of the self that is unclear and constantly changing. Psychoanalytic theory, especially the work of Freud and Lacan helps explain this. While, Freud believes that the mind is split into conscious and unconscious parts, and that hidden memories and desires shape who we are (Corbatta 11). Lacan suggests that identity is formed through language and is never complete. Lacan’s idea of the “mirror stage” shows how we create a sense of self based on reflections, which fits well with how autofiction blends fact and fiction (Önder 14-15).

Autofiction is often seen as a form of “writing therapy”, akin to Freud’s “talking therapy”. Which highlights that through the act of writing, authors delve into their past and uncover profound emotional insights. Doubrovsky, believes that writing enables individuals to confront and comprehend the conflicting aspects of their identities (Corbatta 11). Furthermore, autofiction is linked to poststructuralist theories, which suggest that language is not fixed and cannot completely represent reality. While words may fall short of capturing the entire truth, they can still convey personal and emotional truths that resonate with the writer. This therapeutic nature of writing allows authors to creatively engage with fragmented memories, unresolved feelings, and internal struggles (Mambrol). While language limitations prevent a complete or objective narrative, autofiction embraces these constraints to investigate subjective experiences. In this vein, it serves as a platform for healing, contemplation, and transformation, where the writing process holds as much significance as the narrative itself.

Therefore, one might argue that Psychoanalysis has played a seminal role in shaping autofiction by showing that identity is not fixed, but rather influenced by unconscious thoughts. Instead of showing a clear, logical self, autofiction often uses symbolic and non-linear storytelling to reflect how the mind works. Accordingly, Önder claims that this fragmentation of narrative creates a “dream-like state”, where the unconscious can appear through the writing (32). Lacan’s idea that the unconscious is like a language also fits here. He believed that identity is made through shifting words and meanings. As Önder explains “both language and the unconscious are characterized by constant meaning that is never fixed” (34). Hence, this makes autofiction a perfect genre for exploring the mind. This view of the self is also shown in the way autofiction is written. Writers often leave behind traditional sentence structure and grammar and instead use a more creative and emotional style. Önder points out that Doubrovsky “utilizes a spontaneous and associative writing style that overlooks syntax, punctuation, and structural coherence”, which lets the writing flow naturally and

reveal hidden parts of the self (38). In this way, the self is not shown as whole or fully understood, but as something complex, shifting, and always being created through writing.

The idea of autofiction as a mirror, both exposing and concealing, has a strong connection to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory. The image appears whole and complete, but this perception can be misleading. The baby actually feels clumsy and disconnected from their body (Lacan 75). This mirror image helps form an early sense of "self" or ego, based on an ideal that is not fully real. This concept also applies to autofiction. When authors write about their lives, they create a version of themselves. This version can reveal significant truths, but it is also influenced by fictional elements and language, which can hide or slightly alter parts of the real self.

Autofiction is a genre that merges autobiography and fiction, creating a unique space where the self is both shown and acted out. Philippe Lejeune points out that the autobiographical pact becomes complex in autofiction because the author "both confirms and denies the referentiality of the text" (Lejeune 15). This tension aligns with Lacan's observation that the ego is constructed through an external image that never fully aligns with the individual`s internal reality. Therefore, the self in autofiction is like a mirrored image recognizable yet incomplete, truthful yet altered. Additionally, language plays a vital dual role in this context, both in psychoanalysis and autofiction. Lacan famously claims that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan 40), indicating that unconscious desires and conflicts are articulated through symbolic systems that can both reveal and obscure meaning. In psychoanalysis, language allows individuals to express unconscious content, but it also imposes symbolic limitations that can fragment and change meaning (Fink 102). Similarly, in autofiction, language exposes aspects of the author`s identity and unconscious motivations but might also inevitably reshape and distort them. The narrative voice, word diction, and literary techniques all influence how the self is represented, making the text a place of both discovery and concealment.

Thence, this dual nature of language reveals the tension present in Lacan's mirror stage. During this stage, the ego forms through an image shaped by language and symbols, acting as both a reflection and a distortion. Autofiction captures this idea by depicting a self that is both recognizable and strange. The text serves as a mirror for the author, showing a version of themselves that is partial and mediated, never fully authentic. Thus, autofiction serves as a representation of Lacan's mirror stage, illustrating how identity is created from a reflected image that is both ideal and fragmented. The genre's selfawareness and variety of styles emphasize the changing nature of identity and the difficulties in using language to express personal experiences. Therefore, autofiction not only reveals the complexities of self-identity but also shows the psychoanalytic idea that the self is always a reflection shaped by desire, language, and misunderstanding.

Subsequently, one might contend that autofiction is a type of writing that focuses on emotional and psychological truths rather than just facts. It lets authors mix fiction with their own life stories, exploring deep feelings and experiences. This approach enables authors to express their feelings and experiences, creating stories that connect with readers on a deeper psychological level instead of just narrating real events. By combining real-life experiences with fictional elements, authors provide valuable insights into their feelings and personal journeys, enhancing readers` comprehension of the human psyche (Effe & Schmitt 2). This genre is known for its playful and ironic approach to reality, frequently employing humor to discuss serious matters like trauma, illness, and identity. It allows for emotional sharing and connection with readers. Humor and irony help the author deal with issues, challenge societal norms, and make tough subjects easier to understand. This engaging narrative style enables a thorough examination of tough themes, encouraging readers to reflect on the intricacies of human experience while maintaining a critical distance from harsh truths (effe & Schmitt 4).

Eventually, emotional truth in autofiction is similar to the concept of emotional truth in narrative writing, where the focus is on the emotions associated with memories rather than the factual details,

providing a means for authors to convey the essence of their experiences and emotions (Bird 2022), which means that in autofiction, the emphasis is placed on capturing the genuine emotions tied to personal experiences, rather than strictly adhering to factual accuracy. By prioritizing emotional resonance, authors can convey the core essence of their experiences, allowing readers to connect deeply with the narrative, which means that this approach understands that memories might not always be completely accurate or clear, but the emotions they bring are still real and meaningful. The genre's inherent ambiguity between fact and fiction allows for a nuanced exploration of personal and collective experiences, challenging readers to navigate the blurred lines between reality and imagination (Effe and Lawlor). Despite criticisms, such as those from Julia Kristeva, who argues that autofiction perpetuates problematic psychological mechanisms and commercializes personal narratives, the genre remains a powerful tool for exploring the emotional truths of human experience, offering insights into the psychological and cultural dimensions of storytelling (Masschelein 2022). Thus, one might state that autofiction serves as a medium through which authors can express profound emotional truths, often resonating more deeply with readers than mere reporting events.

I.4 Blurring the Boundaries Between Fact and Fiction

Understanding the difference between fact and fiction is crucial in the context of autobiography. According to Merriam-Webster (2018), a fact is defined as "something that has actual existence", which signifies that a fact refers to something that is real and exists outside of a person's mind or imagination. It represents something true that can be verified, regardless of whether people believe it or know about it. More simply put, a fact stands alone and is not a creation of imagination or "a piece of information presented as having objective reality" (qtd in Depkat 280). Which means that a fact refers to something that is recognized as true and is not affected by personal beliefs or emotions. It aims to depict reality as it actually is, rather than how it might be perceived. This idea is based on

philosophical realism, which claims that things exist independently of our thoughts. Consequently, facts are associated with objective truth, meaning that things exist even if no one is thinking about them.

Whereas, the term Fiction is defined as “something invented by the imagination or feigned” and “The action of feigning or creating with the imagination” (“Meriam Webster” 2018). Which means that, Fiction is not based on actual facts; instead, it revolves around ideas that are imagined or created. In fiction, the stories, characters, and events are all products of the writer`s imagination and creativity rather than reflections of real life, throughout which the main focus is on the art of storytelling, rather than the truthfulness of the content. In this context, fiction refers to stories created from the imagination, not based on real facts. According to Merriam-Webster, it involves inventing events, characters, and ideas. In literary criticism, the focus is on the art of storytelling rather than the truthfulness of the content. While the term can have complex meanings in philosophy and law, here it is used to describe a genre where creativity and imagination are central. Fiction refers to imaginative literature, such as novels, short stories, and novellas. This type of literature creates characters, events, and scenarios, presenting its fictional worlds as if they were real, even though they are not. Although fiction can be inspired by true events, it does not claim to be factual, leaving the connection between the text and reality ambiguous (Depkat 286).

Narratology, the study of stories and their functions, has been influenced by discoveries in brain science. A researcher named David Herman has introduced the concept of Cognitive Narratology. This includes two important concepts, simulation, which refers to the realism of stories, and immersion, which describes our deep engagement with the narrative. These ideas help clarify the line between reality and fiction, and how they can sometimes intertwine. Simulation and imaginative play are fundamental human abilities rooted in mental simulation, which is according to Dokic and Proust, a partly an unconscious process (Dokic and Proust VIII-IX). In fact, simulation is a broad

term that includes much more than just fiction. The initial development of mental simulation theories aimed to explain “mind reading”, which refers to the ability to understand and predict the intentions and actions of others. These theories suggest that mind reading allows people to imaginatively step into another person`s experience. Although mind reading involves a significant narrative aspect, as the “mind reader” engages with different scenarios, it is important to note that not every narrative is fictional (Schaeffer).

While all fiction arises from mental simulation, not every simulation culminates in fiction. Mental simulation is a broad cognitive ability that allows us to imagine events, actions, or mental states without them actually occurring. Mindreading, or the ability to infer others’ mental states, is a key part of this process. It involves simulating their beliefs, desires, and intentions within our own cognitive framework, enabling us to better understand and predict their actions. This process allows us to anticipate others’ behaviors by “putting ourselves in their shoes” (Goldman), and plays a vital role not only in storytelling but also in our daily interactions and social understanding.

In contrast, fictional simulations create characters and events during the simulation itself, without being limited by real-world references. These simulations cannot be validated against actual behaviors, which sets them apart from mindreading. As a result, the outcomes of fictional stories do not directly impact real-world interactions. However, they can influence our thinking about real situations in an indirect way. Schaeffer explores the relationship between fact and fiction, suggesting that narratives often mix reality with imagination. Recent developments in cognitive science have renewed interest in theories of fiction and narratology, highlighting simulation and immersive engagement as key human abilities. These processes work at a sub-personal cognitive level, allowing us to connect with narratives on a deeper level (Schaeffer).

Simulation and imaginative play are basic human abilities based on mental simulation. One important part of this is mind reading, the ability to understand and predict other people's thoughts and actions. Not all stories are fictional, but both fictional and factual narratives can create immersive experiences, encouraging readers to imagine specific worlds. Recent research suggests that reading fiction can improve one's ability to empathize with and understand the thoughts and feelings of others, indicating that the mechanisms of simulation and immersion are not confined to fictional narratives alone (Tamir et al.). Fictional narratives, in particular, are often structured to enhance this immersion. A debated issue in narrative theory is whether heterodiegetic fiction stories told by a narrator who is not part of the story must always include a clear narrator. In such narratives, the narrator exists outside the story world, providing a perspective that is not influenced by personal involvement in the events described (Ketschik et al. 73).

Simulation theory can help explain unusual language patterns found in these types of stories, especially when the narration reflects a character's inner thoughts. These patterns usually do not come from deliberate choices but emerge naturally during the writing process. They show how deep mental and linguistic processes shape storytelling. Fiction often uses language not just to state facts, but to create a rich, imaginative experience for the reader. By freeing itself from the need to be true, fiction can focus on creating strong immersive effects, which may explain the structural features seen in thirdperson narration (Schaeffer).

I.4.1 Mimesis: Where Fact and Fiction Meet

One can't tackle issues related to fact and fiction without bringing into question Plato's mimetic theory. In the fourth century BCE, Plato has emerged as a foundational figure in the examination of literature and its impact on our comprehension of the world. He asserts that significant texts from the Greek literary tradition, including the works of Homer, encapsulated a distinct worldview and

promoted particular values. This was especially evident in the canonical poems of Greek literature, which engaged large audiences and functioned similarly to modern mass media. Plato's literary theory sought to confront the conventional perspectives on poets, who were often accused of presenting falsehoods as truths (Nightingale 2), as he introduced the notion of mimesis, which refers to the artistic depiction of characters and events in the world. In this context, the literary creator 'imitates' or 'represents' these elements through the medium of language, his philosophical response to the nature of reality is intricate. He posited that true reality exists in a metaphysical, divine realm that transcends human experience. He referred to our physical existence as the domain of 'becoming' or 'appearance'.

The phenomena we perceive through our senses are not entirely real; rather, only metaphysical entities, comprehended through rigorous philosophical inquiry, possess true reality. This metaphysical realm is where genuine ethical values reside, and it is only through understanding real goodness such as justice, that they can navigate their ethical choices and actions effectively (Nightingale 2).

Plato posits that literary creators do not depict the true metaphysical realm; instead, they focus solely on the human and physical domains, these authors construct a verbal representation of characters, objects, and events that exist within the realm of appearances, which is neither entirely real nor wholly virtuous. Such representations serve as mere 'images' of worldly entities, possessing a level of reality that is inferior to that of the appearances themselves, in his analysis of literary representation as an 'image', Plato draws parallels between literary works and paintings, noting that literature mimics the appearance and surface qualities of objects, although via the medium of language. Thus, literary mimesis can be understood as a verbal depiction of entities within the realm of appearances, an imitation of that which is not completely real.

The distinction between mimesis and authentic reality is significant. If the world of appearances is already a step removed from the illusion of reality, then mimesis is even further distanced, presenting only fantasy and illusion (Nightingale 3). This naturally leads to the notion of creative imitation, a vital component within the framework of mimesis. Imitation is an inherent human trait that distinguishes humans from animals, enabling them to acquire knowledge through the process of mimicking. In his work, Poetics, Aristotle explores various dimensions of literature, particularly focusing on the concept of mimesis, or creative imitation. The different forms of art vary in their subjects, mediums, and methods of imitation. In artistic expression, imitation can be conveyed through rhythm, language, or harmony, either individually or in combination (Prajabati 32).

On the other hand, Aristotle provides a broader understanding of mimesis as a fictional portrayal of human experiences, as well as a more specialized interpretation of mimesis as the performative or dramatic aspect of poetry (Prajabati 33). Plato critically examines mimesis through the lens of external and objective standards of truth, seeing it as something that hinges on reality; he asserts that poets are responsible for their creations and considers mimetic works to be a form of deceptive pseudo-reality (Prajabati 33). In contrast, Aristotle allows artists the freedom not to strictly replicate reality, he points out that poetry can branch into two different directions, influenced by the distinct personalities of the writers.

Accordingly, Mimesis is a fundamental concept in Greek philosophy that has been extensively examined by both Plato and Aristotle (Prajabati 35). Stephen Halliwell highlights the significance of mimesis in Aristotle's Poetics, asserting that the imitation of different objects is shaped by both the methods employed and the nature of the objects being imitated. Halliwell organizes the concept into categories such as visual representation, behavioral imitation, impersonation, vocal imitation, and metaphysical mimesis, he points out the extensive range of mimesis prior to Plato, which may pose challenges in creating a flexible vocabulary for a stringent theoretical approach. The mimetic

relationship between the material and the metaphysical is exemplified in Plato's Timaeus. In contrast, Aristotle's perspective on mimesis is more strictly delineated and limited compared to Plato's, which may complicate the understanding of his viewpoint. Theories of possible worlds in relation to fiction do not assert that the veracity of fiction surpasses that of factual truth; rather, they indicate that it holds true within an alternate world or universe (Prajabati 36).

In conclusion, this current chapter has focused on examining the relationship between psychoanalysis and self-writing, focusing on how autobiography and autofiction are both distinguished yet connected. The overview of psychoanalysis was provided, establishing the foundation for the exploration of how these forms of writing reflect the complexities of the human mind. By considering both psychoanalysis and autofiction, it is shown that, although distinct, they offer complementary insights into the construction and understanding the self. The concept of mimesis was discussed to illustrate how the boundaries between fact and fiction are often blurred, revealing how autobiography and autofiction combine reality with imagination. As a result, it has been demonstrated that the relationship between psychoanalysis and autofiction is not merely a matter of genre but represents a deeper exploration of how identity, memory, and storytelling shape the understanding of the self.

Chapter II: Self-exploration Through Autofiction in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

Aron Ralston's *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, the author's six-day entrapment in a remote canyon serves as both a physical ordeal and a profound psychological journey. This chapter explores the ways in which Ralston's own personal experience of isolation, trauma, and survival challenges his sense of self and identity. The first section of this chapter sheds the light on the incident and entrapment, setting the stage for the emotional and physical trials Ralston faces. While, the second section delves into the trauma, loss, and disorientation he undergoes as he confronts his mortality. Finally, the third section examines the role of memory in maintaining hope and promoting self-exploration. The final section aims to analyze the act of self-amputation as both a literal escape and a symbolic moment of rebirth. Hence, overall, the current chapter is an attempt to reveal the complex, triangular dynamic of trauma, survival, and identity exploration.

II.1 A Story behind the Story

Aron Ralston is an American mountaineer, mechanical engineer and inspirational speaker, he is well known for surviving a harrowing canyoneering accident in 2003. The popularity of Aron's unbelievable survival story was immediate and intense (Frank 1). Aron's story captured the world's attention back then. He was hiking in Utah when his hand and forearm became pinned between a fallen boulder and a canyon wall. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* is a gripping memoir by Aron Ralston, the book takes readers on an intense journey of endurance, resilience, and the indomitable human spirit in the face of extreme adversity (Meniscus Magazine 1).

It has all began as a simple hike in the Utah canyon land on a warm Saturday afternoon. For

Ralston, a walk into the remote Blue John canyon was a chance to get a break from a winter of solo climbing Colorado's highest and toughest peaks. By the afternoon he found himself endangered, alone, with just the beauty of the place and nature around him. Aron was climbing down a wedged boulder when the rock suddenly and in a horrifying way came loose. The falling boulder pinned his hand and even wrist against the canyon wall. That was the start of six miserable days for Ralston. He found himself trapped by an 800-pound boulder, stuck 100 feet down in the bottom of a canyon. In the midst of this challenging ordeal, Aron has realized that he was going to die. He looked back on his life that was full of adventure and started to document his final will. Meanwhile, Aron's family and friends have already started searching for him. Until one morning, when a sudden idea helped him solve the riddle of the boulder, Aron then made the most extreme and unthinkable choice that was possible for him to survive that is amputating his detained arm.

An adventure writer whose book has helped and inspired Aron as he prepared to get his story down on the paper was Joe Simpson. "*Touching the void*" an award-winning memoir and film. Aron reread Simpson's book as he prepared to write his own. Motivated by the story and his desire to share his experience, he wrote *Between a rock and a Hard place.* In one of his interviews Aron explains the motives behind his decision to document his horrific personal experience "I wanted it to be compelling and I wanted it to be well done" ("Books Makes a Difference"16). which means that he wanted the book to be inspiring and powerful, rather than just a regular adventure book, Aron later adds "I looked at it as this immense puzzle trying to put pieces together in the right order, and I had so much fun with even the technical process of writing" ("Books Make a Difference" 16). He compared writing as solving a puzzle, he also detailed that it was a process that he enjoyed its technical part.

Aron Ralston's memoir, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, intrigues readers in with its intense turmoil of emotions and profound observations about human endurance. The novel is a powerful

example of how resilient the human spirit can be, demonstrating the strength of will in the face of great difficulties and challenges. Throughout his personal account, Aron alternates between chapters describing the delirium of those six days and the choices he must make, and a form of "how I came to be the way I am" recounting of his life story ("Review of *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*"). *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (2004), the best-selling autobiography of the American outdoors-man and motivational speaker Aron Ralston (*Between a rock and a hard place* 5).

II.1.1 Incident and Entrapment, Where the Real Story Begins

On a Saturday Morning Aron sets out on an exciting adventure of self-reliance, eager to explore the remote canyon lands, on a mountain bike (Ralston 13), Aron is an experienced outdoors-man, accustomed to being alone in the nature, and he values the solitude the wilderness provides. His passion for outdoor exploration is evident as he carefully plans his trip and set off into the rugged terrain of Horseshoe canyon (Frank 1).

Ralston sets off on a thirty-mile journey with 25 pounds of gear, including climbing equipment and supplies, as he describes it "the going would be easier if I didn't have this heavy pack on my back, I wouldn't normally carry twenty five pounds of supplies and equipment on a bike ride, but I'm journeying out on a thirty mile-long circuit of biking and canyoneering, traversing the bottom of a deep and narrow canyon system, and it will take me most of the day" (Ralston 14). As Aron moves through the tough terrain, including cattle paths, wide sandy areas, and heavy loads, he reflects on his time in the wilderness and his search for a deeper connection with nature. Throughout his solo journey, Aron unexpectedly meets two women, Megan and Kristi, who are also exploring the canyon "What are the odds?" (Ralston 20), he is surprised to find anyone else this far from the desert. They instantly become friends sharing their mutual love for nature and the wilderness.

Ralston continues approaching the canyon, he is fascinated by the geological features, with precision and fascination, revealing his admiration for the nature around him “All this beauty keeps a smile on my face” (Ralston 28), hiking through slot canyons, Aron sees signs of ancient history, like old petroglyphs carved into the rocks, he was mesmerized by the beauty of the place and the walls around him, he thinks about how beautiful life is, but also how short it can be, especially when compared to the land around him, which has lasted for millions of years. As Ralston moves deeper into the canyon he faces a new challenge, he comes to a very steep drop off, as he describes it “maybe eleven or twelve feet high”, which is said to be higher and shaped differently than the last one he crossed. A “refrigerator checkstone” (Ralston 31). wedged tightly between the canyon walls, because of this a “claustrophobic feel” was created, and the space is compared to a “short tunnel” according to Aron (Ralston 31).

Ralston describes the canyon walls as being “three feet across” (Ralston 31) which shows how tight the space has become. Hence, one might conclude that the feeling of being trapped was already built inside Aron before the real accident even happens. Danger was close because with such narrow spaces every move comes from Aron has to be perfect or he will pay. Ralston explains that so as to manage passing through the very narrow spaces he has to use a technique called “stemming” or “chimneying”, “This technique is known as stemming or chimneying; you can imagine using it to climb up the inside of chimney” (Ralston 31). His body would be pressed between the walls by using his feet and back, switching hands and feet as he moves, even if he has knowledge about such techniques but the difficulty of the climb was made clear. And his control over the situation is slowly being removed by the canyon’s narrow walls.

Gradually, Ralston is pushed into a harder and more dangerous place. His skills and experience are evident; however, it is also apparent that full control remains beyond his grasp. The place forces him into a position where mistakes are more likely to happen. Through all of the situation the sense

of entrapment is being built carefully. Throughout the novel, the canyon is described as an alive entity that is just waiting for Aron to be trapped, “It was like the boulder had been put there, set like a hunter’s trap, waiting for me” (Ralston 39). By comparing the boulder to a “hunter’s trap”, he suggests that the rock was deliberately positioned, almost like it was waiting for him to make a mistake. The phrase “waiting for me” makes it seem like the entrapment wasn’t just a random accident, but something inevitable. This description of the canyon as an active, purposeful entity increases the sense of danger and helps convey Ralston’s feelings of helplessness. It suggests that nature isn’t just a background to his story, but plays a significant role in shaping his fate.

The danger continues when Ralston says “stemming across the canyon at the lip of the drop-off, with one foot and one hand on each of the walls, I traverse out to the checkstone” (Ralston 31). His movements were carefully made but the place around him remains ominously unpredictable. Even after testing the stone by kicking it “I kick at the boulder to test enough to hold my weight” (Ralston 31). The transition from calm to danger is described throughout the critical moment in which Ralston notices the boulder moves, and words like “scraping quake” (Ralston 31), are used to make the scene feel intense. the moving boulder under him and the fear it causes are not mere physical actions, it reflects the deep psychological dimensions of Aron’s identity. For instance, Aron describes the boulder falling toward him blocking the sky in a very intricate manner “The backlist check stone falling toward my head consumes the sky” (Ralston 32). While, the sky is usually a symbol of freedom, its shielding by the giant rock signifies that Aron is no longer free. Hence, one might argue that Aron’s feeling of entrapment by the giant rock is deeply entrenched in his loss of the sense of freedom and free-will. Now for Aron, the falling rock is no longer a part of the natural environment, yet it is a dangerous object threatening his life.

As the rock falls, Aron has to act quickly. He says, “Fear shoots my hands over my head” (Ralston 32), it describes how his body reacts unconsciously before he even has time to think. His

reflexes take over, which is a common survival instinct in dangerous situations. The feeling of panic is so clear in this act. The next moment when Aron realizes he cannot move backward or he will fall off the ledge, to which extent he feels incarcerated. The only thing he can do is try to push off the falling rock and get his head out of the way. His words “my only hope is to push off the falling rock and get my head out of its way” (Ralston 32), this passage describes how little control Aron has and how desperate he was.

The climax of the story which embodies the accident is described using very accurate and vivid details. Ralston’s tactful language in describing his unfortunate entrapment makes the reader feel the pain and fear he is going through. In one of the passages Ralston says, “The next three seconds play out at a tenth of their normal speed. Time dilates, as if I`m dreaming, and my reactions decelerate” (Ralston 32). Hence, this shows how time seems to slow down for Ralston, reflecting his shock and confusion as he realizes the seriousness of his situation. Later, Ralston makes the pain he is feeling very clear when he says “The boulder then crushes my right hand and ensnares my right arm at the wrist” (Ralston 32). these two sentences describe the painful injury he`s feeling, making it easy to imagine how terrible the pain must be. His quick, panicked reaction is expressed as he screams and growls “I yank my arm three times in a naive attempt to pull it out. But I’m stuck” (Ralston 32). This part shows his desperation to escape, but also his realization that he can’t do it on his own.

The fear and panic were even more visible when his mind command him to react and says “Get you hand out of there!”. This shows how strong his will to survive is, even though he knows it might not work. His repeated attempts to push the boulder “I shove against the large boulder” and “thrust upward repeatedly, grunting, ‘come on…move!’ nothing”. Ralston’s efforts lead to no immediate success but he won’t give up even though it feels like no progress is being made, it’s clear that his body is tired and injured, but his mind is still pushing him to keep trying. As he continues to struggle, Ralston experiences a mixture of frustration and resignation, he describes how his body is getting

weaker and more powerless, saying, “I’ve lacerated and bruised the skin over my left quadriceps above the knee” (Ralston 33). Thus, this adds to the feeling of growing pain and the damage his body is taking. His physical state is getting worse, showing how hard it is to survive in such a dangerous and harmful situation.

The panic increases when Ralston drinks water too quickly. Realizing how thirsty he is, he admits, “In five seconds, I’ve guzzled a third of my entire remaining water supply” (Ralston 33). This moment shows how fear can overpower rational thinking. Sigmund Freud’s concept of the death drive “Thanatos”, which helps explain Ralston’s impulsive behavior, as he acts on instinct rather than careful thought (Freud 34). Freud suggests that in extreme situations, the mind may revert to basic, instinctdriven actions, seeking immediate relief rather than considering long-term consequences. Similarly, Charles Darwin’s theory of survival instinct emphasizes how people can become reactive and impulsive when facing life-threatening situations (Darwin 197). Ralston’s rapid drinking, driven by desperation, reflects Darwin’s idea that survival instincts can lead to rash decisions rather than logical ones. This highlights the conflict between rational thought and primal instinct, a struggle that becomes more intense as Ralston’s ordeal continues.

The act of drinking too fast also shows how in such dire situations, stress, fear and panic can prevent someone from acting strategically. After realizing his mistake Aron stops and says “Oh, damn, dude, cap that and put it away. No more water” (Ralston 33), this very moment shows that Aron is starting to regain a sense of logic and self-control. The epiphanic moment is reached as well as the control over the situation. The short and direct commands Aron is giving to himself reflect his urgent need to take charge of his actions after the mistake that has already been made. The subsequent moment is marked by Ralston’s internal dialogue as he attempts to regain composure “Ok, time to relax. The adrenaline’s not going to get you out of here. Let`s look this over, see what we got” (Ralston 33), this moment shows an important psychological transformation, where a calmer

state of the mind is being is being restored. With these words panic was pushed away, and more careful and clear way of thinking is started. Ralston's survival is now dependent on mental clarity than physical force. Instead of panicking, he starts thinking more clearly and calmly. This change is quite crucial for him to survive.

Moreover, the moment of realization is captured when Aron reflects "No, It's not. I'll get out I mean, If I don't get out, I'm going to lose more than my hand. I have to get out!" (Ralston 35). This internal monologue illustrates Ralston's attempt to regain control by defying the hopeless, negative thoughts that are invading his mind. Rather than just focusing on the negativity, he refocuses on the goal which is surviving this situation. The repetition of the sentence of "I have to get out" (Ralston 35) acts like a

reminder for Aron and gives him motivation to keep going.

Yet, Ralston begins to think more logically about his situation. He looked at his body and the tools he has, which shows how he's not just reacting emotionally but thinking carefully, as when he noticed that there is no blood loss and guessed also that there may not be any broken bones "Peering at the bottom of my arm, I check for more blood, but there is none, not even a lone drip" (Ralston 35). Aron's new prudent mindset allows him to see his situation clearly without getting overwhelmed by fear, He even says "I accept this with a sense of detachment, as if I'm diagnosing someone else`s problem", Aron Ralston's ability to detach from his immediate situation reflects psychological theories of dissociation and self-observation. Dissociation, a defense mechanism that allows individuals to distance themselves from intense emotions, helps Ralston maintain composure and analyze his predicament logically (Freud 17). This aligns with Mead's concept of the "I" and "Me", where the "Me" adopts a reflective stance, allowing Ralston to observe himself as an outsider and strategize effectively (Mead 42). Additionally, Freud's theory of the ego as a mediator between instinct and reason is evident in Ralston's ability to suppress panic and focus on survival tactics

(Freud 24). Thus, his detachment becomes a psychological buffer, enabling rational thinking in a life-threatening crisis.

Ralston even wondered how this accident could have happened to him, thinking, “Shit! How did this happen? What the fuck? How did you get your hand trapped by a fucking boulder?” (Ralston 35), this moment shows that he feels the situation is unfair for him and confusing. Even though he is frustrated, he does not let it stop him. Instead, he tries to encourage to himself by saying “No! shut up, that`s not helpful” (Ralston 35), focusing on silencing his doubts and confusion and. only focusing on finding solutions to his current ordeal.

Consequently, Ralston’s entrapment in the canyon marks a critical turning point in his narrative, encapsulating both the physical and psychological ramifications of his ordeal. The boulder pinning his arm is not merely a physical barrier but a manifestation of the internal conflicts and haunting memories that impede him from moving forward, both literally and metaphorically. This transformative incident not only fractures his body but also initiates a profound psychological rupture, where fear and anxiety blur the boundaries between reality and perception. As the narrative transitions to the impact of trauma, the subsequent section will explore how the psychological consequences of Ralston’s entrapment extend far beyond the physical pain, delving into the destabilizing effects of disorientation, temporal distortion, and the haunting persistence of traumatic memories.

II.2 Facing Trauma and Isolation: An Analysis of Aron Ralston’s Experience

In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Ralston presents a compelling illustration of the psychological distress that emerges from intense isolation and life-threatening situations. His story not only does it highlight the physical effects of being trapped but also delves into the significant emotional and cognitive confusion that results from enduring extended periods of fear, suffering, and

powerlessness. In his study of extreme environments John Leach argues that as the environment diverges from the optimal, our control weakens, resulting in increased reactivity, which leads to temporal disorientation and fragmentation of identity (Leach 2). Through Ralston's ordeal, the memoir reflects on the ways in which trauma and loss can disrupt one's sense of self.

The moment when the boulder shifted and pinned his right arm against the canyon wall marked the beginning of his struggle for survival and him pinned there describing the moment, "My disbelief paralyzes me temporarily as I stare at the sight of my arm vanishing into an implausibly small gap between the fallen boulder and the canyon wall" (Ralston 28). This situation serves as a demonstration of Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as an event that surpasses comprehension and resist immediate integration. The sudden and surreal portrayal of Ralston's arm slipping into an unreasonably narrow gap, reflects the dissociative paralysis described by Caruth where she discusses that trauma is "not fully assimilated as it occurs" (Caruth 5). She suggests that traumatic experiences are fundamentally different from ordinary experiences because they overwhelm the mind's normal ability to process events. When a person goes through a traumatic event, the experience is so intense and shocking that the mind struggles to process it at that moment. This means that the traumatic event is not fully "assimilated" the experience is not properly understood or integrated into their memory. Instead, it returns later as fragmented and delayed memories, showing the mental break caused by the intense experiences.

The psyche's initial response characterized by panic, physical withdrawal and a sense of disorientation further reflects Freud's concept of trauma as "a breach in the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud 24). In which the mind is overwhelmed by sensory input that surpasses its protective limits. The trauma deepens as he performs the act of self-amputation, Ralston narrates, "I push the knife into my wrist, watching my skin stretch inwardly, until the point pierces and sinks to its hilt. In a blaze of pain, I know the job is just starting" (Ralston 227). The quote shows how the trauma shifts

from shock to a painful experience which reflects Freud's idea that trauma can overwhelm the mind's ability to protect itself. Ralston starts with fear and confusion, but he chooses to face the trauma, the severe pain shows that his mental defenses have already been broken, and his realization that the fight is just starting implies that trauma impacts both the mind and body over time.

This also supports Elaine Scarry's idea that severe pain shatters language, driving expression to lean towards metaphor and bodily expression. As she puts it "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (Scarry 4), in Ralston's vivid and detailed portrayal describing the blade entering his own skin serves as evidence of the breakdown of traditional narrative structure under the burden of profound pain and severe agony. His emphasis on the visual "watching my skin stretch inwardly" externalizes the experience, suggesting a detachment from the wounded body. This dissociative tone highlights the fragmentation of consciousness caused by trauma, aligning with Scarry's concept that extreme pain breaks down language and pushes a person beyond what can be verbally expressed.

Furthermore, the statement that "the job is just starting" (Ralston 227), emphasizes temporal and psychological dimensions of pain, indicating that each moment does not signify progress but rather an extension of distress. This delay in relief is consistent with Lacan's concept of the fragmented body image, in which the individual holds onto the illusion of bodily completeness while it is, in fact, irreparably broken (Lacane 5). Ralston's awareness of the initiation of pain, rather than its resolution signifies a challenge to the notion of the body as an unreliable and fragile construct. Instead of holding onto the illusion of a complete body, he is forced to face the reality that his body is broken. The delay in feeling better indicates that his body is not functioning as one, but has become a place of damage and weakness. In this moment, the distinction between his body and his self begins to blur, and the sensation of pain uncovers the body's instability. As Ralston admits "But I begin to

understand my body is failing" (Ralston 253). This direct encounter with the body's limits reflects Lacan's theory, showing how trauma shatters the illusion of a complete self and reveals the painful reality of a broken body.

II.2.1 Blurring Temporal Boundaries

Despite his perpetuating attempts for survival, Ralston's psychological battle is carried out through "phantom-like" feelings, as he admits that in interview with GQ magazine "What I have in its place is this phantom sensation" (Friedman 2003). In psychoanalytic theory, the term "phantom" refers to the unconscious effects of a loss or trauma that has not been fully understood or expressed as Freud describes it "The phantom is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life" (Abraham qtd.in 171). For him the "phantom" is a psychic construct which is a kind of unconscious presence left behind by unspoken traumas, secrets, or losses, often tied to a love object. It "objectifies" the absence or hidden part of that object, and can manifest as hallucinations or persistent mental images. According to Freud, when certain emotional truths or painful experiences are hidden or left unspoken, they may return in disguised forms such as intrusive thoughts or imagined figures. So, in simple terms, the phantom becomes a symbol of what is missing or repressed, and it continues to affect the person's sense of self and emotional life. Like in Ralston's case, the trauma caused his hallucinations even after losing his hand.

The trauma associated with amputation endures beyond mere memory, it also manifests in the body's reflexive responses, reinforcing the deep-seated connection between physical damage and symbolic dissolution. In this context, Jung's notion of the 'psychoid' notion, a transitional space where psychological and physical realities intersect and becomes notably significant, as he describes in his book, "the archetype as such is a psychoid factor that belongs, as it were, to the invisible,

ultraviolet end of the psychic spectrum" (Jung 277), he describes a space where the mind and body are closely connected, shedding light on Ralston's experience, In the moment when his body fails, the clear boundary between physical sensation and personal identity begins to break down, his trauma reveals how deeply the body and mind are linked. As he notes in his novel "Without sensation, it doesn't seem as much my hand" (Ralston 29), expressing the unsettling feeling of disconnection from his own body and this aligns with Jung's theory that unconscious experiences can appear both as mental images and physical symptoms.

The ongoing experience of a phantom limb, even in its absence, shows that the body remembers what the conscious mind recognizes as absent. This conflict indicates a deeper framework where trauma affects both the mind and body, making it hard to categorize (Jung 243). Freud's concept of the shadow of the lost object falling upon the ego as he explains it in his book *Mourning and Melancholia* "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object" (qtd.in Becker). In his theory of melancholia, when someone loses something important, such as a loved one, a relationship, or even a part of their body, they may not fully let go of that loss. Instead of mourning and moving on, the individual subconsciously attaches to the lost item by relating to it, the ego starts to treat itself as if it were the lost object, causing emotional pain and low self-esteem. Ralston's physical ordeal becomes a key moment for personal growth and identity reconstruction. Losing his arm is more than just a physical injury, it represents a significant change in how he sees himself and Freud's theory helps us understand why some losses are so difficult to overcome and how they can shape a person's inner life in lasting ways.

Providing an additional psychoanalytic perspective, this highlights that loss is experienced not only on a cognitive level but also manifested physically. The phantom limb serves as a site where grief, identity, and embodiment meet causing the trauma to be both sensed and re-experienced in

both literal and metaphorical ways. Temporal disorientation adds more complexity to his trauma. “The next three seconds play out at a tenth of their normal speed. Time dilates, as if I’m dreaming, and my reactions decelerate” (Ralston 27). Hence, throughout this passage, Ralston recounts his experience, illustrating how time appeared to compress while he was trapped. This reflects what Judith Herman calls the “dialectic of trauma” (Herman 34). Which entails the individuals who have gone through trauma usually face a range of strong memories and emotions. In this context, the passage of time may seem to stand still or lose its conventional meaning. Ralston’s experience of entrapment cultivates sensation of timelessness, causing each moment to feel protracted and disconnected from the rhythms of everyday existence.

Accordingly, this reflects what Cathy Caruth describes in *Unclaimed Experience*, trauma’s interference with the perception of time. In her book, Caruth argues that trauma is not immediately understood at the time of its occurrence but is instead experienced subsequently manifesting through its persistent presence. She notes that what returns to the survivor is not the original event, but rather its relatedness, its inability to be easily situated in time (Caruth 18). The struggle of trauma to remain in the past aligns with Ralston’s psychological state, where time seems to flow endlessly. Time does not progress in a typical, linear progression, instead, it becomes unstable showing the repetitive and uncertain aspects of trauma.

Ralston’s narrative serves as a compelling illustration of Caruth’s theory on trauma highlighting its potential to blur temporal boundaries and confine the subject within an instant that is not completely comprehensible or escapable. Further Ralston perceives hallucinations, particularly a vision of a child from the future as he describes it “The boy happily perches on my right shoulder, holding my arms in his little hands while I steady him with my left hand and right stump” (Ralston 201). This moment occurs during one of Ralston’s hallucinations, brought on by exhaustion, dehydration, and stress. The boy is not real but imagined, symbolizes hope and connection in a

moment of deep isolation, giving him emotional strength and a reason to keep fighting for survival. Following that the moment of realization when he said “Then, with a shock, the vision blinks out. I’m back in the canyon, echoes of his joyful sounds resonating in my mind” (Ralston 201). This moment shows the sudden return to reality after Ralston’s hallucination fades. Even though they disappear, its emotional effect remains reflecting how the mind, under intense stress, can create meaningful images that help a person cope with trauma and fear.

These dreamlike episodes blur the lines separating reality from imagination, emphasizing the psychological instability caused by enduring pain when his mind is burdened by anxiety and loneliness, his consciousness projects an optimistic future symbolized by the child as a mechanism for coping with an unbearable present. This vision signifies a delayed response to trauma occurring not at the time of the injury, but during the enduring mental fragmentation that follows. Then he ultimately performs the act of self-amputation, which he describes in vivid details with CBS News, “I was able to first snap the radius and then within another few minutes snap the ulna at the wrist and from there, I had the knife out and applied the tourniquet and went to task. It was a process that took about an hour” (Vries 2003). In the review of Spokesman mentions his description of his feelings after the process “There was the euphoric feeling of being free and getting my life back again” (Prettyman 2010), this moment signifies the apex of the trauma narrative, characterized not only by physical liberation but also as a critical existential moment where loss and personal agency meet. Although he sacrifices a part of his body, yet he regains his life and reclaims the narrative of his experience. It highlights how the autobiographical account serves as a powerful reflection on trauma’s ability to confuse a person and take away parts of their identity, while also leading to significant inner change.

II.3 The Role of Memories and Past in Self-Exploration

In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, memory is crucial in Aron Ralston's survival and selfdiscovery. While he is trapped, Ralston often recalls his past, his family, friends, and the decisions he has made. These memories are not just random thoughts; they give Aron an emotional strength, help him face his fears, and motivate him to survive. At the same time, remembering his past allows Aron to reflect on who he is and who he wants to be. Through memory, he finds meaning, purpose, and the courage to take dire action. In this way, memory becomes a strong tool that not only helps him survive but also helps in understanding himself better during a very tough time.

Throughout the novel, memories serve as a seminal tool for Ralston's self-exploration during his entrapment. Isolated and facing death, he revisits key moments from his past, reassessing his life's trajectory. As psychologist Daniel L. Schacter explains, "Memory is not just a replay of the past but a reconstruction that helps individuals make sense of their present" (Schacter 72). Ralston's recollections are not passive; they are active reinterpretations that help him find meaning in his dire situation. For instance, Ralston recalls his decision to embark on the solo hike despite warnings, reflecting on his over confidence that he had ignored the basic rule of wilderness travel, "But I go out by myself and I don't tell someone where I'm going, that's just dumb" (Ralston 109), because he did not think he will need help. This moment of introspection reveals how memory forces Aron to acknowledge his flaws, marking the first step in his self-exploration.

Ralston's past outdoor adventures shape his survival instincts, demonstrating how previous experiences inform present resilience. His mountaineering and engineering background provide him with the skills to problem-solve under extreme conditions. As psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman notes, "Past experiences of overcoming adversity contribute to learned resourcefulness, enabling

individuals to persist through future challenges" (Seligman 45). Ralston's memory of a prior climbing accident, where he narrowly escaped death, resurfaces during his entrapment "we rousted ourselves and roped up for protection against falling into a crevasse while we climbed the mountain's upper glaciers" (Ralston 88). This recollection reinforces his determination, illustrating how past struggles serve as psychological anchors in moments of crisis.

In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Aron Ralston's recollections are essential to both his survival and his process of self-exploration. While trapped, Ralston often recalls his past, his family, friends, and the decisions he has made. These memories are not just random thoughts; they give him emotional strength, help him face his fears, and motivate him to survive. As psychologist Daniel Schacter explains "Autobiographical memory is crucial for self-continuity. In traumatic situations, recalling past experiences can provide both a sense of purpose and a framework for overcoming adversity" (*Searching for Memory* 1996). For Ralston, memory becomes a lifeline, reinforcing his will to live. At the same time, remembering his past allows him to reflect on who he is and who he wants to be.

Through memory, he finds meaning, purpose, and the courage to take action. In this way, memory becomes a powerful tool that not only helps him survive but also aids in understanding himself better during a very tough time. At the beginning of his struggle with the bear, Ralston's memories seem to weigh him down. When the bear stalks him and follows him on the way, he is overwhelmed by the desire to give up "I felt like giving up, throwing my food bag to him, damn the regulations not to feed the bears and most strongly, I wanted to cry" (Ralston 54). In this moment, the memories of his past, where he was free from such danger, create a feeling of helplessness. He wishes to return to that life, where he wasn't in constant fear of survival.

However, as the situation deepens, Ralston's memories start to work in his favor. His despair turns into anger, and he finds strength in his past experiences "My despair turned to anger. 'Leave me alone!' I shouted right in his face" (54). This shift is important because it marks a turning point. Instead of feeling helpless, Ralston channels his anger and memories of strength into action. He even uses a quote from *Pulp Fiction* to boost his confidence "I'm gonna get some hard pipe-hitting rangers to come out and get medieval on your ass! They're gonna tranquilize you and ship you off to Idaho!" (Ralston 55). By using this reference, Ralston temporarily escapes his fear and regains a sense of control, showing how memories can provide both comfort and strength during difficult situations. This aligns with William Blazek's observation that "survival narratives frequently depict memory as a means of sustaining identity and purpose in extreme situations" (*Journal of American Studies* 2012). Hence, one might conclude that Ralston's recollection of pop culture, survival skills, and past triumphs helps him resist despair.

Ralston also draws on his past survival skills, which come into play as he faces the bear: "I reached into the tree well and grabbed the softball-sized rock to carry for self-defense" (Ralston 55). This moment demonstrates that his memories of past hikes and outdoor experiences help him react quickly and think practically in a life-threatening situation. The survival skills he has learned guide his actions, showing that survival is not just about emotion but also about remembering what he has learned and applying it when needed. Jonathan Gottschall supports this idea, claiming that when individuals are trapped in life-threatening situations, their past experiences are instinctively recalled and reconstructed. Through this process, their ordeal is made sense of, and their will to live is reinforced. This act of reflection provides a sense of control and purpose, which can be crucial for survival (*The Storytelling Animal* 2012).

Ralston's physical memories also play a pivotal role. When he gets stuck in the snow, his memory of past physical actions helps him get free "I twisted left at the waist and rolled onto my

back over my right shoulder, popping my legs out of their holes" (Ralston 55). This action shows how survival often relies on learned movement and instincts. Ralston's past experiences with outdoor activities help him make fast, decisive actions, allowing him to overcome obstacles in the present. As the struggle continues, his past experiences shape his routine and decision-making "I reloaded with the same rock and turned south once more" (Ralston 56). Each encounter with the bear becomes a new pattern of survival, with his memories providing guidance as he faces similar dangers. In the final moment of his ordeal, Ralston reflects on his past "I was done with Wyoming and rain and post-holing, and most of all, I was done with bears" (Ralston 56). This moment of reflection shows how his memories help him move forward. By processing what he went through, he begins to let go of the fear and trauma associated with his experience. His decision to leave the area and avoid future danger marks the end of his struggle and his mental shift from being a victim of circumstances to someone who can control his fate.

Moreover, while trying to free himself from the boulder, Ralston shares that he begins to think about the first time he visited Utah. He says, "I'm not sure what brings it to mind. Perhaps it's in response to the nagging question of how did I get here, how did I end up stuck in this place?" (Ralston 62). This shows that memory comes almost automatically, as a natural reaction to his entrapment. Thinking back is not random; it is Ralston's way of finding meaning and connection to his present suffering. Remembering his first trip to the canyon brings him back to the origin of his deep relationship with the landscape, which now traps him but also reconstructs who he is.

In one of the passages, Ralston recalls are full of life and emotion. He remembers being a teenager on a spring break trip with his family, visiting Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon, and Zion Canyon. At first, he was not excited "The weeks before we left, all my friends were excited for their skiing trips or vacations to Mexico. Me? I was going to Utah with my parents" (Ralston 62). This simple teenage disappointment contrasts with what he experiences later, a moment of real wonder at

the beauty around him. When he helps Betty Darr, a family friend who uses a wheelchair, push up a hill, she tells him to look up. Ralston writes "I looked up and almost let go of her. We were at a sweeping vista encompassing hundreds of orange and pink sandstone towers" (Ralston 63).

Significantly, this is a key moment where the shock and beauty of the landscape hit him deeply. He says, "I was stunned, and can trace my fascination for canyons back to the emotions I felt at that viewpoint" (Ralston 63). Though he was only fourteen, this emotional reaction planted a seed in him, a calling to explore wild places that would later define much of his adult life. Jerome Bruner explains this phenomenon: "We construct ourselves through the stories we tell about our past. Memory is not a passive recorder but an active shaper of identity, allowing us to reinterpret who we are in moments of crisis" (*Acts of Meaning* 1990). Therefore, for Ralston, this memory reconnects him with a part of himself that is not just suffering but is also filled with wonder, love, and meaning. Ralston also remembers Betty Darr, a woman who had faced great challenges with a positive spirit. Betty had been paralyzed by polio when she was a little girl, yet she was "the most well-read person" (Ralston 62) he had ever met and spent her life helping others, like prisoners learning to read. Aron describes her "Her humanity saw in them their potential; nothing else mattered" (Ralston 62). Betty's positivity left a lasting mark on Ralston's soul. Even at his lowest moment in the canyon, memories of Betty's bravery and joy in life offer him a kind of spiritual support.

Another powerful memory Ralston recalls are watching the sunrise at the Grand Canyon. At first, he resisted "It was cold, and I hated having to get up so early" (Ralston 63). But because of Betty's gentle encouragement, "We'll be right over at the benches when you're ready to see the sunrise", he joins his family. The experience is unforgettable "The canyon exploded in an array of dozens of temples, buttes, gorges, and pyramids, brought into glowing contrast with encompassing canyon walls by the sunrise's glowing rose-colored light" (Ralston 63). Through this memory, Ralston

remembers that the world holds a beauty that is unimaginable, beauty that can only be experienced through effort, patience, and openness.

Even though at the time he was “bratty” and “cranky” (Ralston 63), the memory stays with him. Aron later realizes “Her positive attitude and zest for life was so instilled in me that I developed a passion and urgency to experience and discover the world that borders on obsession” (Ralston 64). Here, Aron reflects on Betty’s influence, a lasting memory that shaped his attitude. This idea is echoed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian-American psychologist “Memories of significant others, mentors, family, friends, often serve as psychological resources in crises, offering models of resilience and hope” (*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 1990). Thus, on this basis, one might argue that Betty’s impact on Ralston exemplifies how memory can serve as both a survival tool and a compass for self-discovery.

II.3.1 When the Past Speaks Back: Memory as a Key to Survival

Trapped by a boulder, without food or water and facing the possibility of death, Aron turns inwards and explores who he is through the memories of people he loves and the experiences he has lived. Ralston’s connection to his past becomes a source of strength. As he faces death, he talks to God and reminds himself of the choices he made “I’ve decided that regardless of what I might go through, I don’t want to take my own life”. Even though he is weak and close to dying, he says “I am going to see this through, whichever way it ends” (Ralston 194), This shows Aron’s inner strength, but also how he is trying to stay truthful to himself, his past decisions and values guide him even in this hurtful moment. Memories help Aron stay mentally active when his body is in a weak condition. He says “The lack of demands from my body leaves nearly my full attention on sustaining my mind”. His memories become his way to keep his mind clear. When he says “Time passes most quickly when I am recounting memories. I return again and again to them” (Ralston 194), it shows

that remembering his past helps him survive mentally. This is where we see memory not just as comfort, but as a tool for exploring what is really important in his life.

Ralston's vision of playing with his imagined son "smiling, I prance about the room... he giggles gleefully as we twirl together" (Ralston 227), transcends mere escapism. This moment exemplifies what psychologist Martin Seligman calls "prospective memory" the brain's ability to simulate future joy as a survival mechanism (Seligman 135). The vision's sensory richness "sun dapples on the oak floor" makes it neurologically vivid" Taking control over his physical pain. On this regard, Cathy Caruth notes "What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (Caruth 6). Ralston's son, a future self as father, becomes such a hybrid, fusing his past "family values" with future unrealized fatherhood, to create what he calls "That belief, that boy, that changes everything" (Ralston 227).

The vision's transformative power mirrors Daniel Schacter's research on adaptive memory "The brain edits memories to emphasize hope. What we recall is not what happened, but what we needed to happen" (Schacter 301). Ralston's mind edits his memory, replacing the canyon's silence with his son's laughter, as he describes "echoes of his joyful sounds resonating in my mind" (Ralston 227). This auditory memory acts as a lifeline, what neuroscientist Endel Tulving would call an "episodic beacon", which is a sensory memory that guides behavior toward survival (Tulving 88). When Ralston declares, "I am drawing power from every memory of my life" (Ralston 262), he embodies Paul Ricoeur's theory of "narrative identity". Ricoeur contends that "We become who we are by internalizing memories as chapters in an ongoing story" (Ricoeur 153). Therefore, one might deduce that Aron's act of self-amputation, "pulling tight the remaining connective tissues" (Ralston 262), is both literal and metaphorical, he severs not just flesh but his old identity, while the vision of his son midwifes a new one.

Ralston's vision of playing with his imagined son "smiling, I prance about the room... he giggles gleefully as we twirl together" (Ralston 227), is more than just daydreaming. It shows what psychologist Martin Seligman calls "prospective memory" the brain's way of imagining future happiness to help us survive hard times (Seligman 135). This vision is full of sensory details "sun dapples on the oak floor", which makes it feel real and strong enough to help him forget the pain. Echoeing Cathy Caruth's words when she states "Trauma shatters linear time, forcing the mind to reconstruct identity through fragmented past-future hybrids" (Caruth 72). In this case, Ralston's vision of his son, a child he doesn't have yet, mixes his past family values with his possible future which is being a father. That mix provide Ralston with both hope and strength. He later describes "that belief, that boy, that changes everything" (Ralston 227). In interviews such as the one with state college , Ralston has shared how powerful this vision was. In one of his interviews, Aron Ralston described the vision of his son during his entrapment, saying that he saw himself with a little boy in the future (Flicks

2:59). This vision was so vivid and powerful that it gave him the strength to continue his struggle for survival. Aron felt a deep connection with his child, and this image of fatherhood inspired him to take the drastic step of amputating his arm to escape, as he was motivated by the desire to be there for his future son.

Ralston's brain replaces the canyon's painful silence with happy sounds from his vision, "echoes of his joyful sounds resonating in my mind" (Ralston 227). These sounds comfort him and give him hope. In the same vein, Neuroscientist Endel Tulving calls this type of memory an "episodic beacon", which is a memory that helps guide a person toward survival (Tulving 88). Later on, Ralston says, "I am drawing power from every memory of my life" (Ralston 262), this shows how important memory is for him. When he cuts off his arm "pulling tight the remaining connective

tissues" (Ralston 262), it's not only a physical act. It is also a sign that he is leaving behind his old self, the risk-taker, and becoming a new person who values life and family more.

Aron Ralston's memories play a crucial role in his self-exploration during his darkest moments while being trapped in the canyon. His memories are not just emotional burdens but also powerful tools that help him survive and make sense of his dire situation. They serve as a lifeline, guiding his actions, providing him with the strength to persevere, and helping him rebuild his sense of identity after the traumatic experience. As he reflects on significant moments from his past, these recollections offer him both clarity and resolve, enabling him to better understand his capacity for survival. Through these memories, Ralston is able to explore the depths of his mental and physical endurance, ultimately finding a way to come to terms with his ordeal. This process of reflections not only contributes to his physical survival but also aids in his emotional healing, allowing him to emerge from the experience with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper understanding of himself.

II.4 Amputation as an Awakening: The Rebirth of Aron Ralston

Before his life-changing accident, Ralston was a self-reliant and an independent adventurer who has often prioritized solitude and personal challenges than meaningful connections with others. He directly admits this in his narrative, stating "I am alone in an infrequently visited place with no means to contact anyone outside the fifty-yard throw of my voice" (Ralston 31). This statement illustrates a perspective shaped by self-reliance and a risk-taking desire. However, when he finds himself trapped in Blue John Canyon by an 800-pound boulder, this very self-reliance turns into a very dangerous flaw.

His isolation, once a source of pride, becomes a critical weakness.

Throughout the six days without food or assistance, Ralston experiences a significant internal evolution. As he runs out of water, he records video messages for his loved ones, reflects on his past

experiences, and is compelled to confront his own mortality. It is during these moments of extreme vulnerability that he begins to experience a significant mental and emotional transformation. He has a vision of a child, a boy whom he identifies as his future son, in his book he writes "A blond three-yearold boy in a red polo shirt comes running across a sunlit hardwood floor in what I somehow know is my future home. By the same intuitive perception, I know the boy is my own" (Ralston 201). This epiphany represents a significant shift in his perspective. Instead of thinking only about his own survival, he starts to picture a future that goes beyond the canyon, one filled with love, family connections and meaningful objectives.

The act of amputating his own arm is not just a moment of escape, but a symbolic rebirth. As he describes it "For the second time in my life, I am being born. This time I am being delivered from the canyon's pink womb, where I have been incubating. This time I am a grown adult" (Ralston 230). In this passage Aron effectively uses powerful metaphors to portray his escape from the canyon as a significant rebirth. By characterizing the canyon as a pink womb in which he has been incubating, Ralston presents his experience not just as a tale of survival but as a journey of transformation. This metaphor suggests that the canyon, despite being the scene of his life-threatening experience, also acts as a supportive environment that aids in his psychological and spiritual rebirth.

Ralston himself conveys the transformation, stating in an interview with GQ magazine in 2003 "I felt a euphoria, having gone through the process of grieving over my own death and then being given a rebirth" (Friedman 2003). This reflection underscores the depth of Ralston's metamorphosis. Then when he continues saying "When we're born, we don't have the senses, the cognition, to understand what it means to be born. And for me this second birth came with all the advantages of being a fully grown adult and knowing what it means" (Friedman 2003). This quote highlights the profound transformation experienced by Ralston. Unlike his first unconscious rebirth, this second

emergence is defined by a sharp consciousness and intentionality. The experience urges him to reconsider his life choices and cultivate a fresh gratitude for living.

On the other hand, the canyon, which once symbolized restriction, becomes a transformative space for personal growth, illustrating how extreme challenges can lead to significant self-realization. Scholars such as Joseph Campbell, in his monomythic theory, suggest that the hero must undergo symbolic death before renewal, "where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence" (Campbell 23). This idea of rebirth is about how Ralston understands his trauma not as an end, but as a painful beginning to a new beginning. In an interview with the CU Independent, Ralston echoes this reflection

"I had accepted my death, so to step out of my grave in that moment was extraordinarily powerful" (Coughlin 2010). This shows that his survival extended beyond the physical realm and he also experienced emotional and spiritual growth. Upon leaving the canyon, he gained a completely new perspective on life.

Ralston's transformation connects closely with what psychologists Tedeschi and Calhoun describe as post traumatic growth. According to their research, people who go through major trauma can sometimes experience deep positive change as a result of their suffering. In their words, post traumatic growth includes "greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life; and spiritual development" (Tedeschi & Calhoun 6). Hence, on this basis one might conclude that Ralston's story exemplifies all five, His near-death experience forces him to reevaluate what truly matters, helping him value life more and build a stronger connection with loved ones. The severe physical and emotional struggles he goes through reveal a significant inner strength, and his healing leads him to new paths, like telling his story to motivate

others. Furthermore, his reflections throughout and following the ordeal indicate a spiritual awakening, showing how trauma can transform can transform not only the body but the entire self.

II.4.1 Ralston's Post-Accident New Identity

Following Aron's rescue, he has experienced a significant transformation that altered his sense of self, values, and life purpose. Once a fiercely independent adventurer who often set out on solo journeys without notifying anyone, Ralston emerged from his experience with a deeper understanding of the importance of connection and vulnerability. He has finally reached to the realization that his survival is not only a reflection of physical strength, but also of the emotional ties that supported him in his darkest moments. Reflecting on this, he confesses in an interview with American Society of Mechanical Engineers "ASME" saying, "Being a father now is really the ultimate confirmation of everything that I learned as a lesson in the canyon. That life is really about relationships, it's not just about the accomplishments, that the universe operates on love" (walsh 2011). Ralston's vision of a future with his unborn son inspired Ralston to seek freedom, a vision that came to the realization with the arrival of his son, Leo. He chose this name to honor the courage that motivated his earlier escape.

Embracing his role as a motivational speaker, Ralston began sharing his story with the aim of inspiring resilience and hope among others. Throughout which he highlights the significance of interpersonal connections and the human ability to overcome challenges, revealing in another interview with Elevation Outdoors Magazine "I learned it's not enough to enrich our own lives, but we need to enrich other people's lives, to be there when someone else needs it" (kassar 2012). His experience taught him that life's true value lies in love and connection, as he plainly admits it in an interview with Den of Geek "What's most important in my life is my family. I don't spend so much

time outdoors alone, even compared to a few years ago, because my focus is on being with them" (Lambie 2011).

In conclusion, Ralston's journey from isolation to connection, and from self-reliance to recognizing the importance of others, exemplifies the remarkable transformative power of human beings when faced with extreme hardship. His journey reflects changes not just in his environment but also in his emotional and spiritual insights, showing that pain can lead to a deep personal growth. This aligns with Viktor Frankl's existential theory, which emphasizes the importance of finding meaning in suffering, as he notes "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning" (Frankl 51), Ralston's experience of survival and change illustrates that challenges can help us rethink what is important in life, affirming that genuine strength often emerges from vulnerability and the recognition of our dependence on one another. Ultimately, Ralston's story is a powerful reminder that identity is not fixed, but shaped through experience. When encountering transformative life experiences, people have the ability to redefine themselves, often discovering a new sense of purpose, connection, and understanding of meaningful living.

Chapter III: Identity Reconstruction Through Narrative

This chapter examines the role of the narrative in the reconstruction of identity following trauma. When traumatic experiences disrupt a person's sense of self, storytelling becomes a crucial means of making sense of those experiences and restoring coherence. Through narrative, individuals are able to reinterpret their past, regain control, and begin the process of healing. Highlighting how the act of narrating one's experience facilitates identity reconstruction, emphasizing the importance of narrative as both a psychological and therapeutic tool in the aftermath of trauma.

III.1 The Quiet Struggles of Post-Trauma

In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, the aftermath of Aron Ralston's trauma extends far beyond the moment of his escape from the boulder. While the physical injuries may eventually heal, the psychological and emotional scars remain deeply rooted. This trauma transforms his internal world, forcing him to reconsider his identity, relationships, and life's purpose. His act of survival signifies not an end but the beginning of a long and complex journey of healing and self-discovery. The persistent effects of his ordeal reveal how trauma continues to echo through his life, shaping his thoughts, decisions, and self-perception long after the immediate danger has passed. Ralston's trauma follows the classical framework described by trauma theorists, it is not a single event, but a deep break that impacts his memory, identity, and view of the future. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (Caruth 4). And thus, returns in the form of repetition and haunting and this framework is effectively demonstrated in the novel, where the trauma of his entrapment and self-amputation continues to affect him beyond the physical incident.

Ralston does not experience a distinct sense of relief or closure after escaping the canyon, rather, he carries the emotional and psychological burdens of the experience into his daily life. As he describes in an interview with CNN American's morning "I'm not sure that psychologically I'm totally over the fact that I no longer have a right arm" (Hemmer 2003). This quote shows that even after surviving his harrowing ordeal and physically healing, he continues to face the psychological aftermath. His mention of the loss of his arm signifies more than just a physical absence, but as a lasting mental and emotional wound which is a clear sign of trauma that doesn't end with survival but also lives on in identity and memory.

Aligning with Herman's assertion that "Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable" (Herman 1). That shows certain traumatic experiences can be so overwhelming and emotionally devastating that survivors struggle to express them even when the event ended, the trauma remains locked inside, unexpressed, due to its intense pain or the complexity of processing it. This silence, or inability to fully articulate the experience, is part of the psychological aftermath, a core symptom of trauma. His trauma becomes a part of how he sees himself and the world around him. Ralston's story demonstrates that surviving trauma is only the beginning of a much longer journey one in which the past continues to live in the present.

Even in his return to everyday life, Ralston's behavior reflects the psychological effects left by trauma. He shows symptoms that correspond with Bessel van der Kolk's definition of the trauma imprint "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present" (Van der kolk 32). Ralston's hyper-awareness, constant alertness, and emotional transformation all indicate the ongoing influence of a persistent presence.

This perspective highlights the enduring impact of trauma, suggesting it alters the individual's physiological and psychological processes long after the initial event. Reflecting on this experience, Ralston stated in an interview with British GQ Magazine "I had the opportunity to kill myself, just put myself out of my misery but I chose life. Trauma, when it happens, can be a blessing or a tragedy. It can be a good thing or the excuse we've been looking for our whole lives to just check out and not try" (Ralston 2010). And this profound reflection illustrates how Ralston's traumatic experience left an unforgettable mark on his psyche. He does not return to nature as the man he once was. Instead, he is more careful, that trauma reshapes not only how one sees the world but also how one moves through

it.

This is evident from what he says in an interview about his changing, "I learned that if you let your ambition drive you without check from your intuition, you are going to get into trouble" (Friedman 2003). This change in behavior illustrates the lasting influence of trauma on commitment perception, what was thrilling has turned into a potential threat. Ralston's new way of thinking shows the deep scars left by his experience. He doesn't go back to nature as the same person. Now, he is more cautious and thoughtful, evidence that trauma reshapes not only how one sees the world but also how one moves through it.

III.1.1 Trauma as a Trigger for Transformation

Judith Herman, in her psychological framework of trauma recovery, states, "Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery" (141). Ralston represents this stage by not ignoring the trauma, but by using it to rebuild his life with different priorities. His traumatic experience helps him shift his attention to purpose, and building relationships. As he mentions that in another interview with Ryan "It took a long time before I was able to move past what I was doing

with adventure and climbing, and really start to focus on relationships." (Lambie 2011). His words signify more than just a decision; they represent a deep psychological transformation. The trauma drives him to reshape his life around values he had ignored, being open with emotions, showing vulnerability, and practicing gratitude. The experience of amputation and survival is not a conclusion but the beginning of a new existence as he mentions it in an interview "when something happens it's a trauma, but we decide whether it's going to be a tragedy or a triumph" (Ralston 1:08). His priorities and self-image are completely transformed. Thus, trauma acts as both a force of destruction and a source of creation in Ralston's journey.

However, the emotional scars remain but he has never expressed regret for the choices that ultimately saved his life. In fact, Ralston describes this experience as a major change that has transformed his entire perspective on living. He recognizes the pain and struggles but accepts the result with gratitude believing it to be the best thing that ever occurred to him. In an interview he explains "Thanks for what that experience has given me. if I had to do it all over again today and now with the blessings of my life that I have today, I would cut my other hand off in order to get back to my son" (Couric 0:37). Highlighting his belief that survival through trauma can unlock deeper meaning and growth. Instead of focusing on what he lost, Ralston emphasizes the freedom and new purpose he found after surviving, he realizes that the experience made him face his weaknesses and live life more fully focusing on relationships, adventure, and authenticity. His attitude embodies a remarkable resilience, transforming what many consider a tragic event into a source of strength and inspiration.

He also states that in The Ellen Show interview saying, "It is the greatest experience that will ever come to me in my life and it has given my life, I think such a deeper meaning. I came to recognize my priorities" (Ellen 9:14). Ralston's story questions traditional views on pain and regret, illustrating that even the toughest experiences can lead to positive change and self-discovery.

III.2 Ralston's Reconstructed Self

Aron Ralston's harrowing experience in the novel presents a compelling narrative of survival, resilience, and transformation. The act of amputating his own arm to free himself from a boulder not only symbolizes a physical escape but also serves as a powerful metaphor for his rebirth and selfredefinition. This analysis explores how Ralston's traumatic experience reshapes his identity through a psychoanalytic and existential lens, drawing on Freud's concept of trauma, which he describes as "a breach in the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud 10). Lacan's notion of the Real, defined as "that which is beyond language, beyond the symbolic order" (Lacan 53). And Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, emphasizing that "suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning" (Frankl 51). While Freud explains the overwhelming impact of trauma, Lacan highlights its unspeakable nature, and Frankl shows how healing is possible through finding meaning. Together, they offer a deeper understanding of how trauma disrupts, resists explanation, and can ultimately be transformed.

Subsequently, the focus turns to the crucial moments leading up to and during the amputation, emphasizing how this life-changing experience becomes a defining point in Ralston's journey towards self-discovery. As he prepares to cut off his arm, he confronts both his physical limits and his inner strength, marking a powerful turning point in his sense of self. Ralston reflects "I stepped out of my grave and into my life again" (qtd. in Roth-Johnson 1). This realization epitomizes Lacan's notion of the Real; a deeply traumatic experience of facing death that is too overwhelming to put into words or to make sense of through usual beliefs or ideas. By accepting the reality of death, he unexpectedly gains a sense of control, reflecting Frankl's idea that meaning is found through suffering, not in avoiding it. Hence, trauma serves as a powerful starting point for a new beginning, emerging from destruction (Leigh 1712).

Ralston's narrative reaches its most transformative point as he amputates his arm to escape the canyon. This act aligns with Lacan's concept of the Real as an encounter with the limit of existence "The Real is the impossible, the encounter with what cannot be symbolized" (Lacan 62), and Frankl's assertion that suffering can enable self-transformation, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves" (Frankl 51). Ralston transitions from powerlessness to agency, accepting his situation and acting decisively, embodying Lacan's Real as the confrontation with mortality.

Furthermore, when Ralston asserts "If I torque my arm far enough, I can break my forearm bones"

(Ralston 257), he shifts from passive endurance to active agency. This moment represents Lacan's Real, where his actions expose the raw truth of existence. By taking deliberate, painful action, he confronts the stark reality of his situation, embodying the confrontation with what is unspeakable and unimaginable. Frankl's logotherapy further illuminates this shift, Ralston's suffering gains purpose when he reclaims control through his will to survive. In choosing to break his own bones, he asserts his power to act even when all control seems lost. Therefore, one might argue that the amputation exemplifies transcending adversity through meaning, illustrating how extreme suffering can become a turning point in redefining one's existence.

Moreover, Ralston's emergent self is characterized by clarity and purpose during the amputation. Despite the pain, he enters a trance-like state "I leave behind my prior declarations that severing my arm is nothing but a slow act of suicide and move forward on a cresting wave of emotion" (Ralston 258). The "cresting wave" evokes rebirth, aligning with Frankl's existential defiance, the freedom to choose one's attitude. As he states, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms, to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances"

(Frankl 75). Ralston's choice symbolizes autonomy, mastering trauma through action, akin to Freud's repetition compulsion.

Interestingly, the amputation becomes a symbolic shedding of the old self. As Ralston declares "For the second time in my life, I am being born" (Ralston 262), highlighting his transformation. Freud's idea of trauma as a break that reshapes the self fits here. What was once a place of entrapment, the canyon, now acts as a space for rebirth, reflected in the strong imagery of the "pink womb" and "bloody afterbirth" (Ralston 262). This not only captures the physical reality of the amputation but also symbolizes the severing of Ralston's old identity, making room for a new one. This, once again, connects with Lacan's idea of the Real as a force that changes identity, where facing death disrupts normal understanding and forces a new sense of self. In this way, trauma becomes the driving force behind his rebirth.

Ralston's narration integrates trauma into his new identity, exemplifying Lacan's "traversing the fantasy" and "The subject must cross the plane of illusion to reach the reality of his being" (Lacan 74). He confronts the amputation's gruesome details, stating "I am drawing power from every memory of my life, and all the possibilities for the future that those memories represent" (Ralston 262). By linking his will to survive with a vision of his future, Ralston begins to accept his new sense of self, reflecting the principles of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. In this process, narration becomes a powerful tool for rebuilding identity after a crisis, allowing him to reframe his experience and find meaning in his suffering. By telling his story, he not only asserts control over his trauma but also reshapes his identity in a way that aligns with his renewed sense of purpose and hope.

III.2.1 The Emergence of a New Self: Identity Transformation Through Action

Ultimately, the amputation becomes a moment of liberation. As Ralston exclaims "I AM FREE!" (Ralston 262). Conveying not only his physical release but also a profound sense of mental

emancipation. This declaration underscores a pivotal shift from paralysis to agency, aligning with Lacan's concept of the Real as a moment of existential clarity. The canyon, once a symbol of death and entrapment, now becomes the site of his rebirth, a place where suffering transforms into a powerful source of self-realization. His reflection "And all of a sudden, I felt a euphoria, having gone through the process of grieving over my own death and then being given a rebirth" (qtd. in Friedman 3) encapsulates the transition of his self-perception from a victim to a survivor, illustrating how confronting death can ultimately restore a sense of control and purpose.

Moreover, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Lacan's "mirror stage" helps to explain Ralston's initial sense of self. His solo hike emphasizes his separation from the other, a key idea in Lacanian theory, showing his sense of isolation. While trapped, Ralston becomes aware of his vulnerability and experiences a strong sense of absence and a desire for emotional connection, especially with his family. This moment marks a turning point in how he understands and depends on himself. His acceptance of life's uncertainties, shown in his statement, "Everything happens for a reason, and part of that beauty of life is that we're not allowed to know those reasons for certain" (Ralston 104), reflects his growing understanding of his limitations and need for others.

Existentially, Ralston's transformation reflects Frankl's idea which claims that "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves" (Frankl 1959). By amputating his arm, he exercises existential freedom, rejecting Sartre's "bad faith" and embracing authenticity. In the face of an unchangeable situation, Ralston takes full responsibility for his survival, which exemplifies Frankl's notion that we can always choose how to respond to suffering. His statement, "You'll never find your limits until you've gone too far" (Ralston 190). During a moment of profound reflection on Day Six, Ralston expresses this insight, recognizing that surpassing his physical and mental boundaries leads to a deeper self-understanding. Ralston's choice to cut off his arm is a strong example of how identity can be shaped through decisive action. In this

intense situation, the act of selfamputation is more than just a way to survive, it becomes a moment of taking control, where Ralston shows his willpower and independence in the face of life-threatening danger. This act not only saves his life but also changes how he sees himself, showing how moments of crisis can deeply affect a person's identity.

Ralston's journey toward self-reconstruction reflects Jung's concept of individuation, as he gradually brings together the fragmented parts of his identity to form a more unified and complete self. His recovery process highlights the vital role of familial bonds, demonstrating how his intense experience not only reshapes his sense of self but also deepens his connections with others. This transformation from isolation to meaningful relationships underscores the profound impact of trauma on personal growth. When he describes his ordeal as "the most beautifully spiritual experiences of my life" (Ralston 314-315), he reveals how even the most harrowing circumstances can become pathways to self-discovery and spiritual awakening. This perspective aligns with Frankl's logotherapy, suggesting that suffering can lead to profound inner change when one finds meaning in the experience, allowing it to become a source of strength and renewal.

Aron Ralston's transformation during his ordeal extends beyond mere survival, representing a profound existential and psychoanalytic process that redefines the nature of selfhood. His confrontation with mortality in Blue John Canyon dismantles previous illusions of invulnerability and self-reliance, resulting in the emergence of a new self-characterized by vulnerability, relationality, and the capacity to choose meaning in the face of suffering. Viewed through the frameworks of Jacques

Lacan's concept of the Real, Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, and Sigmund Freud's trauma theory, Ralston's narrative illustrates the paradoxical power of trauma to both deconstruct and reconstruct identity. The amputation of his arm signifies more than a physical act of survival; it symbolizes a severance from his former life and a rebirth into a world where suffering functions as a

transformative passage. Ralston's experience thus serves as a powerful example of human resilience and reinvention, demonstrating how profound crisis can give rise to a more authentic, interconnected, and purposeful existence. In this way, his journey exemplifies the emergence of a "new self" born not in spite of trauma, but because of it.

III.3 Identity Reconstruction Through Writing

Aron Ralston's harrowing survival story is more than a tale of physical endurance; it is a powerful example of how writing can help reconstruct the self. After being trapped in a Utah canyon and having to amputate his arm to escape, Ralston wrote his memoir*, Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, not only to share his experience but to reshape his identity. Through this narrative, he looks back at his life before the accident and how it changed him afterward, showing that writing can turn trauma into understanding. Showing that people form a new sense of self by making sense of their experiences through storytelling.

More broadly, writing is one of the most intimate and transformative acts through which individuals can create, analyze and reconstruct their sense of self. It provides a deep engagement with one's inner life, acting as both a reflective tool for identity and a mechanism for its transformation. As Murray explains in his book *Write to learn* in chapter (writing is discovering) that writing not just to express what we know, but to discover what the writer don't yet know, about his thoughts, feelings, and the world. Through writing, he uncovers meaning and even aspects of his identity, making the process one of personal and intellectual discovery (Murray 3-4). This idea positions writing as an epistemological process, writing goes beyond just capturing identity; it actively helps shape it.

The process of writing enables individuals to share their personal experiences, and ultimately rewrite them in ways that are coherent and meaningful. In this sense, writing acts as a transformative

space, allowing fragmented or conflicting identities to merge into a single entity. Aron Ralston's memoir functions in exactly this way, rather than just detailing the incidents that took place in Bluejohn Canyon, his writing becomes a site of self-discovery, through the act of narrating his ordeal. Ralston examines not only how he managed to survive but also the motivations that inspired his will to live, what values sustained him, and how the experience reshaped his sense of purpose and identity. His book mirrors the process Murray describes, transforming raw experience into thoughtful insight.

Moreover, the psychologist and expressive writing researcher James Pennebaker has shown through decades of empirical research that writing about personal experiences, particularly traumatic or emotionally significant events, has the capacity to improve both psychological and physical health. He explains "After a death or other trauma, writing helps us sort out complicated feelings and memories" (Pennebaker 82). Then he continues explaining "writing helps us organize, structure, order, and make meaning of these experiences. As a self-reflective exercise, it is beneficial to cknowledge our deepest emotions and thoughts" (Pennebaker 83). In this way, one might conclude that writing provides a structure within which the self can process, turning confusion into clarity. The narrative becomes a form of self-care and identity formation, allowing the writer to both acknowledge past versions of the self and dream of new, stronger identities. According to Pennebaker, the act of crafting narratives can change our self-perception and our interactions with others and the broader world. Ralston carefully describes the mental and emotional impact of his entrapment, his growing despair, his hallucinations, and the eventual decision to amputate his own arm. By turning to narrative, he is not only processing trauma but also understanding it.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur takes this idea further in his work *Oneself as Another*, where he proposes the concept of "narrative identity". He writes "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told"

(Ricoeur 147-148). In other words, who we are is closely linked to the stories we tell about ourselves. This identity is not fixed but is instead continually formed through narratives, especially in written form. For Ricoeur, the self is about interpretation, we turn our experiences into coherent narratives that help us connect our past and present. Writing thus becomes an existential task, allowing individuals to take control over their past and future by shaping the narrative structure of their identity.

This approach highlights the performative aspect of writing, where the self is formed through language. Ralston, in telling his story, he redefines himself from a reckless adventurer driven by isolation and thrill-seeking to someone profoundly connected to life, family, and purpose. The story he tells is not only of survival, but of self-transformation, making Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity come alive in his written journey.

III.3.1 Survival Narratives and the Practice of Self-Writing

Michel Foucault underscores the role of writing in self-formation. In his lectures on Technologies of the Self, Foucault explains that in ancient Greek and Roman traditions, writing was a "spiritual exercise" meant to transform the self. He writes "Writing was also important in the culture of taking care of oneself" (27). He sees it as a way to fashion oneself into a certain kind of moral and reflective subject. This ancient practice has modern implications, through journaling, autobiographical writing, or even fiction, people shape identity that aligns with their values and evolving understanding of the world. This idea is vividly present in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, where writing becomes

Ralston's way to deal with deep questions and reshape his values. The memoir goes beyond just survival, it serves as a journey of self-reflection, humility, and personal growth. By documenting not

only his escape but also his regrets, insights, and new commitments. Ralston actively constructs himself as a different kind of subject being more aware and caring and stable person.

In the realm of literary theory, the concept of self-construction through writing is also prominent. The two theorists, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in their influential book argue that "Autobiographical acts are investigations into and processes of self-knowing" (Smith and Watson 63). They continued explaining that in writing the self, narrators shape identities that are never fixed but always in process. This notion reinforces the idea that the self is never static, and writing is the means through which identity becomes clear and flexible when they mention the performative narrating "I." (Smith and Watson 120). Explaining that, the "I" in autobiographical texts is both author and character, constantly negotiating authenticity, memory, and desire. Each written self is a performance, a strategic selection of moments, emotions, and reflections that shape how one is seen and how one sees oneself.

This performative aspect is evident in Ralston's narrative, as he continuously negotiates between who he was and who he wants to become. His memoir performs identity, reflects on decisions, and invites readers into an evolving self that emerges from pain and self-inquiry. "I wanted to reveal to myself who I was, the kind of person who died, or the kind of person who overcame circumstances to help himself and others" (Ralston 67). This self-reflective statement shows how his writing becomes a space of self-definition, where identity is not just remembered but remade. The readers encounter in the final pages is not the same man who entered Bluejohn Canyon. Through the act of autobiographical writing, he performs and solidifies this transformation for both himself and his audience.

Ultimately, writing offers a space of freedom and agency, especially for those whose identities have been marginalized or fractured. On this regard, Bell hooks write "writing which enables us to hold on to life even as we are clinging to old hurts and wounds and that writing which offers to us a

space where we are able to confront reality in such a way that we live more fully" (Hooks19). Hence, for Hooks, writing allows writers to reclaim their voices and define themselves, avoid being forgotten, and highlight their varied identities. Thus, writing serves not only as a means of expression but also as a significant and liberating form of self-creation. Ralston's experiences broke him both physically and emotionally, but through writing, he took control and rebuilt his identity, his memoir is filled with hope, not just for his survival, but for how he turned great suffering into a tale of recovery, relationships, and resilience. Writing helps him rise above being a victim and take charge of his life.

It symbolizes his will and vision, where healing and growth begin with words.

In conclusion, writing emerges as a profound tool for self-discovery and identity reconstruction. It enables individuals to face their thoughts, challenge them, and reshape their stories, creating clarity from chaos. Aron Ralston's autobiography, *Between a Rock and a Hard* Place, effectively demonstrates this concept. His story goes beyond survival; it represents a journey of self-creation, where trauma becomes wisdom and reflection leads to renewal. Through his writing, Ralston not only revisits his past but also redefines who he is. His narrative shows that writing is not just about recording life; it is a way to recreate it showing that identity is fluid and constantly evolving.

III.4 Autofiction as Therapy

In *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, Aron Ralston's narrative serves as a poignant illustration of how autofiction operates as a therapeutic mechanism. By blending factual elements of his entrapment with elements of introspective storytelling, Ralston uses autofiction as a tool to grapple with the emotional and psychological toll of his ordeal. This form of self-writing, merging autobiography with fiction, becomes an act of self-exploration and emotional processing, providing him with a means to externalize his trauma and confront the internal chaos of his situation. By

intertwining reality and imagination, he navigates the complexity of his identity and the overwhelming impact of his traumatic experience. Through his narrative, Ralston does not merely recount his ordeal but actively engages in a process of self-reconstruction, using storytelling as a vital means to cope with his vulnerability and transform his suffering into a source of personal insight.

The therapeutic power of autofiction comes from its ability to give structure and control. In this way, Ralston's use of memory and imagination is crucial. According to Philippe Lejeune in *On Autobiography*, self-writing allows individuals to "reconstruct their past in ways that foster a sense of continuity and self-affirmation" (Lejeune 1989). This act of re-creation in writing helps individuals move beyond the rawness of their trauma, as it offers an opportunity to assert agency over the story they tell. Ralston embodies this by reflecting on his past experiences and using them as a cognitive strategy to maintain his sense of self. As he recalls moments with friends, such as his adventures with Mark Van Eeckhout, Ralston is not merely passing time; he is engaging in an act of mental preservation "I was thinking about Mark Van Eeckhout, all the great times we've had together" (Ralston 194). This reflection helps him keep his sense of self by reconnecting with moments of happiness and connection, which helps balance out the feelings of isolation and despair caused by his entrapment.

III.4.1 Confronting Mortality through Autofiction

In addition, key moment where autofiction works as therapy occurs when Ralston records a video message for his family, confronting his mortality. He writes his farewell, saying, "Grandmas, I love you both, proud matriarchs. All my relatives in Ohio, I love you" (Ralston 196). By confronting the inevitability of his death and articulating his thoughts on video, Ralston is using writing as a mechanism to assert control over his narrative. Drawing on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being*

and Nothingness, we see that this confrontation with mortality, where Ralston acknowledges his eventual death, is an example of what Sartre calls "existential authenticity". Sartre suggests that by recognizing the reality of one's mortality, individuals can embrace their finite existence, thereby removing the fear and paralysis that typically accompanies it (Sartre 1956). In this context, Ralston's confrontation with his possible death represents a moment of existential authenticity, wherein accepting his mortality allows him to transcend despair and assert control, transforming his ordeal into an opportunity for selfrealization and meaning-making.

However, Ralston's act of self-reflection and writing serves as a powerful psychological outlet that helps him reclaim control over his experience with death. By narrating his ordeal in his own words, he transforms the traumatic event from something that happened to him into something he can actively process and make sense of. This act of storytelling allows him to confront the fear and helplessness associated with his near-death experience, diminishing death's power over him. In essence, Ralston's writing serves not merely as a narration of his experiences; it is a declaration of his agency, portraying him as a survivor rather than a victim. This process not only provides him with emotional relief but also assists in reshaping his identity in the aftermath of his traumatic experiences.

Additionally, Ralston's acceptance of his fate offers another profound example of how writing in autofiction serves therapeutic purposes. As he contemplates his impending death, Ralston writes "I've come to accept that fact, and with acceptance, my looming dread dissipates, leaving only emptiness" (Ralston 157). This moment of acceptance represents a shift in his psychological state; he transitions from fighting against death to surrendering to it. In this respect, his writing parallels D. W. Winnicott's concept of the "potential space" in psychoanalytic theory. The "potential space" is a transitional area where internal and external reality intersect, providing a therapeutic medium for processing trauma (Winnicott 1971). Writing serves as a key way for Ralston to navigate the space

between his internal fears and the external reality of his entrapment. Through writing, he can process his emotions and confront the overwhelming fear and isolation he faces. This act allows him to make sense of his situation, turning his internal struggles into a coherent narrative that helps him cope with the harsh reality of his experience.

Moreover, through his writing, Ralston engages in what psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott terms the "transitional space" in his work *Playing and Reality*. This space allows the individual to navigate reality and fantasy, thus providing a context for emotional healing. Ralston's reflections, as he writes about his memories and imagines his final moments, represent this "transitional space" where he moves between his lived experience and the imagined possibilities of connection and release (Winnicott 1971). In fact, writing about his memories, such as his reflection on Mark Van Eeckhout, allows Ralston to affirm his identity and maintain his mental stability during his isolation. By revisiting his memories, he reconnects with his sense of self, helping him cope with the trauma. This process gives him a way to reflect on his past, providing a sense of continuity and purpose. In this way, autofiction becomes a therapeutic tool, helping Ralston navigate his emotional survival by turning his experience into a coherent narrative.

Furthermore, Ralston's critique of his past behavior, especially concerning relationships, offers a crucial turning point in his narrative. As he reflects on his shortcomings, particularly his failure to appreciate his relationships, he notes "I didn't enjoy the people's company that I was with enough, or as much as I could have" (Ralston 157). This critique is a powerful example of how autofiction becomes a tool for identity reconstruction. Here, Ralston reconfigures his sense of self by focusing less on individual accomplishments and more on the relational aspects of his life. This mirrors the work of Julia Kristeva in *The Powers of Horror*, where she argues that identity is constantly reconfigured through the process of confronting one's limitations and failings (Kristeva 1982). By

recognizing the importance of connection with others, Ralston begins to rebuild a sense of self that is more aligned with his evolving values.

Ralston's confessions of regret, like admitting he failed to tell others about his plans or value his relationships, highlight the ethical side of autofiction as therapy. By taking responsibility for his past decisions and mistakes, Ralston engages in a form of self-atonement, allowing him to reflect on and make peace with his past actions. As literary theorist Shoshana Felman explains in *Testimony Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, writing serves as a form of "witnessing" that allows the subject to bear witness to their own trauma (Felman 1992). By taking responsibility for his actions and reflecting on his regrets, Ralston gains control over his own story, recognizing that he plays a role in shaping his fate. This reflection provides him with an opportunity for emotional release, allowing him to process his trauma more effectively. Through this, he comes to terms with his past, finding a way to accept the choices he made and the consequences they brought, which ultimately aids in his emotional healing.

In conclusion, Aron Ralston's use of autofiction in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* underscores how self-writing can be a powerful therapeutic tool for processing trauma. By intertwining factual recounting with introspective storytelling, Ralston externalizes his trauma, confronts the fear of death, and begins to reconstruct his sense of identity. As theorists like Philippe Lejeune, Jean-Paul Sartre, D. W. Winnicott, and Shoshana Felman have argued, the process of self-writing allows individuals to reorganize their chaotic experiences and create new meaning from the trauma they've endured. Through writing, Ralston transforms his overwhelming psychological pain into a structured narrative, enabling him to reflect on his past, revisit significant memories, and imagine possible futures. In doing so, he not only processes his traumatic experience but also uses autofiction as a tool of survival and self-reconstruction, showing how narrative can facilitate emotional healing and personal growth.

Conclusion

This dissertation sets out to examine the complex relationship between fact and fiction in autobiographical self-writing, particularly focusing on Aron Ralston's *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Through the intersectional lenses of psychoanalysis, and trauma theory, this study has demonstrated how traumatic events can be transformed into meaningful narratives that not only tell stories of survival but also function as instruments of identity reconstruction and psychological recovery. Through a reading of Ralston's memoir as a genre-defying work of autobiography and autofiction, the study highlighted how narrative can act as a space for both factual representation and creative reinterpretation, particularly following transformative trauma.

The first chapter set out the theoretical background to the research. It begins with a detailed overview of psychoanalysis and its development beyond Freud, emphasizing how unconscious processes, repression, and trauma influences individual identity and narrative representation. The second section examines the changing boundaries of autobiography and autofiction and finds the blurred lines between factual life writing and fictional methods. Instead of seeing these genres as antithetical, the chapter places them as complementary facets of the practice of self-writing. This theoretical position enables insight into the ways that memory, and particularly traumatic memory, resists linear representation and frequently necessitates innovative reworking. The final sections of the chapter present the encounter between psychoanalysis and autofiction, and Aristotle's theory of mimesis, providing critical tools to analyze how Ralston's narrative mirrors and re-creates reality.

The second chapter turns to Ralston's memoir as a case study, applying the theoretical frameworks to textual analysis. The traumatic incident in Bluejohn Canyon was not only a physical event but a profound psychological rupture. The moment of entrapment becomes the starting point for selfexploration and existential questioning. As Ralston confronts his own mortality, memories

from his past resurface, not in chronological order but as emotional and symbolic fragments. This chapter examines how those memories act as lifelines, helping him construct meaning and maintain a sense of identity in isolation. The amputation, a literal act of survival, was also interpreted as a symbolic rebirth, a break from the past and the emergence of a transformed self. By blurring the temporal order and combining internal monologue with factual reporting, Ralston's narrative reveals the inherently hybrid nature of trauma writing. Fact and fiction do not compete but rather, they cooperate to convey the emotional truth of a fragmented experience.

The third chapter focuses on what happens after trauma, the reconstruction of identity through narrative. The first section examines the psychological aftermath of survival, emphasizing that physical healing does not mark the end of trauma. Ralston's post-accident life is marked by internal struggle, guilt, and reflection. The second section shows how he begins to reconstruct a new sense of self through action, responsibility, and a changed relationship with the world and others. The narrative thus becomes a mirror of post-traumatic growth. The third section argues that writing itself plays a central role in healing. Through self-writing, Ralston reclaims agency over a chaotic experience. He organizes his fragmented memories into a coherent story, using narrative as a tool for self-understanding. The final section raises critical questions about autofiction as a therapeutic method. While autofiction allows Ralston to reflect and reshape his experience, it also challenges the reader to consider how emotional truth often requires stepping beyond strict factual retelling. In this sense, autofiction becomes both a coping mechanism and a literary strategy, helping the narrator confront his mortality and emerge with a new identity.

Throughout the three chapters of this dissertation, a consistent argument emerges that Ralston's Between a Rock and a Hard Place is something more than a survival story, rather, it is a multilayered narrative in which memory, trauma, fiction, and identity intersect. The memoir challenges traditional notions of autobiography by incorporating fictional techniques and reflective symbolism, enabling

the writer to express what cannot be fully captured by objective reporting alone. This research contends that self-writing, particularly as it relates to trauma, must be evaluated not in terms of facticity alone but in terms of emotional truth and psychological reconstruction.

Across the three chapters of this dissertation, a consistent argument emerges, that Ralston's Between a Rock and a Hard Place is not just a survival story, it is a layered narrative where memory, trauma, imagination, and identity intersect. The memoir challenges traditional notions of autobiography by incorporating fictional techniques and reflective meaning, which allows the author to express what cannot be fully captured by objective reporting alone. This study affirms that selfwriting, especially in traumatic contexts, should not be judged solely by its factual accuracy but rather by its emotional authenticity and its role in psychological reconstruction.

In conclusion, this dissertation reaffirms the transformative power of self-writing. Aron Ralston's narrative illustrates how trauma can fracture identity, but also how narrative can rebuild it. By moving between fact and fiction, memory and imagination, suffering and growth, Ralston reshapes his experience into a meaningful story. His memoir becomes a testament to the human capacity for resilience, self-reflection, and rebirth. Through the integration of psychoanalytic theory, trauma studies, and literary analysis, this research has shown that autobiographical narratives like Ralston's are not just personal testimonies, they are literary acts of survival and healing. In the end, between a Rock and a Hard Place stands as an example of how writing the self is both a confrontation with pain and a celebration of life.

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Résumé

Cette recherche vise à explorer l'interpénétration entre la réalité et la fiction dans l'écriture de soi et les récits autobiographiques, à travers l'étude du récit autobiographique d'Aron Ralston, ''*Entre un rocher et un endroit difficile*'' (2004). L'écriture de soi est un genre littéraire qui brouille les frontières entre la vérité objective et l'interprétation subjective, soulevant ainsi des questions sur la crédibilité du récit personnel. Cette étude cherche donc à répondre à des interrogations fondamentales, telles que : comment la mémoire et la perspective personnelle structurent-elles le récit ? Et les auteurs sont-ils réellement capables de relater leurs expériences personnelles sans altération ni déformation ? Le récit de Ralston, qui relate son épreuve extrême lorsqu'il s'est retrouvé piégé dans un canyon isolé et contraint de prendre des décisions vitales aboutissant à un acte incroyable, constitue une étude de cas significative pour analyser la construction du récit de soi. Par ailleurs, à travers une approche d'analyse psychanalytique, ce travail s'appuie sur des concepts et des théories clés, telles que la déconstruction de Jacques Derrida et les notions de soi et d'identité chez Jacques Lacan. L'étude examine également les techniques narratives employées par Ralston, comme la description minutieuse et l'impact émotionnel, afin de créer un équilibre entre exactitude factuelle et créativité narrative pour captiver le lecteur. En définitive, cette recherche met en lumière la nature duale de l'écriture de soi, où l'expérience vécue coexiste avec le récit fictionnel, complexifiant ainsi la représentation du moi et de la réalité dans la littérature.

Mots-clés :

Écriture de soi, Récit autobiographique, Réalité et fiction, Aron Ralston, Crédibilité, Créativité.

الملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معالجة التداخل بين الحقيقة والخيال في الكتابة الذاتية والسير الذاتية، وذلك من خلال دراسة رواية آرون رالستون الذاتية "بين صخرة ومكان صعب(2004) " تعُدّ الكتابة الذاتية نوعًا أدبيًا يمَوّه الحدود بين الحقيقة الموضوعية والتفسير الذاتي، مما يثير تساؤلات حول مصداقية السرد الشخصي. لذلك، تسعى هذه الدراسة للإجابة عن أسئلة جوهرية، مثل: كيف تشُكّل الذاكرة والمنظور الشخصي بنية السرد؟ وهل يستطيع الكُتاّب فعلاً سرد تجاربهم الشخصية دون تحريف أو تعديل؟ يعُتمد في هذا البحث على رواية رالستون التي توثقّ تجربته القاسية أثناء احتجازه في وادٍ ناءٍ، واضطراره لاتخاذ قرارات مصيرية تنتهي بفعلٍ لا يصُدقّ، وذلك كدراسة حالة مهمة لتحليل بناء السرد الذاتي. علاوةً على ذلك، ومن خلال مقاربة تحليلية نفسية، تتناول هذه الورقة مفاهيم ونظريات أساسية مثل نظرية التفكيك عند جاك داريدا، ومفاهيم الذات والهوية عند لاكان. كما تبحث الدراسة في استخدام رالستون لتقنيات السرد، كالوصف الدقيق والتأثير العاطفي، لتحقيق توازن بين الدقة الواقعية والإبداع السردي وجاذب القارئ. وفي نهاية المطاف، تبُرز هذه الدراسة الطبيعة الثنائية للكتابة الذاتية، حيث تتعايش التجربة المعاشة مع السرد الإبداعي، مما يساهم في تعقيد تمثيل الذات والواقع في الأدب.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الكتابة الذاتية، السرد الذاتي، الحقيقة والخيال، آرون رالستون، المصداقية، الإبداع.