

Faculty of Arts

Autobiography, Biography, Memoir, and Letters: Redefining the Genres of “Life Writing” for Both Women and Men

Dissertation

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Anotace

Poslední velký posun od auto/biografie ke psaní života není novinkou a není poslední. Žánry se objevují, rozvíjejí, rozšiřují, sloučí a rozmazávají v závislosti na sociálně kulturním kontextu a dalších determinantách. Tento vztah není jednostranný. Hranice jsou otázkou rovnováhy, konvencí a očekávání zúčastněných stran, včetně čtenářů a online hodnocení zájmových skupin a autorů.

Čtení Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years a příběh Margaret Meadové podávané kava na Samoa mi připomněli povídku mé matky. Jako Češka pracovala roky jako učitelka v beduínské škole a často vzpomínala na stejnou událost: „podávalo se speciální jídlo při obřadu „Fadua“ k vyhánění zlých duchů, kde mi byl řád a způsob podávání neznámý. Moje zkušenost fungovala!“ Její příběhy mohly vyprávět o cestě, kterou se vydávají antropologové. Jsou si vědomi kontextu, ve kterém pracují, a zůstávají v jeho nitru ostražití. Přechod z kultury do kultury připomíná imigraci, zatímco souhra různých faktorů ovlivňuje způsob práce antropologů. Stejně jako v autobiografii Mead, mnoho determinantů hraje roli při rekonstrukci jejího životního příběhu, což ztěžuje jeho rozpoznání jako umění nebo vědu. Dynamika je velmi složitá a k zachycení těchto interakcí a vzájemných vztahů je zapotřebí nový model.

Velká část vědeckého obsahu by mohla zmizet, nebo literatura z vědy zmizí, pokud kategorizujeme text bez zohlednění různých aspektů. Absence textů v každé disciplíně snižuje dopad, který mohou mít na komunitu čtenářů.

Jejich očekávání a potřeby lze dnes přímo či nepřímo sledovat. Mapování potřeb a očekávání může otevřít dveře pro vstup nového žánru na trh a špičkové technologie hrají hlavní roli při vytváření konkurence a tvorby žánrů.

Tato studie přispěje k tomu, jak hledáme literární nebo vědecké texty. Prakticky by determinanty a textové faktory mohly být přiváděny do algoritmů představujících konkrétní žánr s minimální podmnožinou prvků. Algoritmus by mohl být spuštěn na velkých datech sestávajících z literárních textů, aby byly tyto spisy co nejvíce přiřazeny žánrům biografického charakteru. To ukáže historii žánrů, dynamiku jejich vzhledu, expanzi, regresi a slučování. Algoritmy založené na modelu by čtenářům umožnily najít více spisů v konkrétních žánrech nebo podžánrech, jinak není definováno obvyklými bibliografickými vyhledávači.

Abstract

The latest major shift from auto/biography studies to life writing is not new and will not be the last change. Genres appear, develop, expand, merge, and blur depending on the social-cultural context and other determinants. This relationship is not unilateral. Boundaries are a matter of balance, conventions, and stakeholder expectations, which include readers and online ratings of interest groups and authors.

Reading Margaret Mead’s Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years, I recall her story of being served kava in Samoa, and it reminded me of my mother’s short story. As a Czech woman, my mother worked for years as a teacher at a Bedouin school and often recalled an event similar to Meads: “A special meal was served at the Fadua ceremony to banish evil spirits, where the order and the way of serving were unfamiliar to me. My experience worked!” Her stories could tell about the path that anthropologists take: They are aware of the context they work in, and they remain vigilant about themselves within that context. Moving from culture to culture reminds me immigration, while an interplay of diverse factors affects anthropologists’ method of work. In Mead’s autobiography, many determinants played a role in reconstructing her life story, making it difficult to recognize her work as art or science. The dynamic between the two is very complex, and a new model is required to capture these interactions and interrelationships.

Much scientific content could go missing in literature or the literature could disappear from the books of science if we categorize a text without considering different aspects of it. The absence of texts in each discipline reduces the impact they can have on the community of readers.

Today, reader expectations and needs could be monitored, directly or indirectly. Mapping needs and expectations can open the door for a new genre to enter the market, and high tech plays a leading role in creating the competition and the mixture that takes place in generating genre.

This study will contribute to the way we search for literary and scientific texts. Practically, determinants and textual factors could be fed to algorithms representing a specific genre with the minimum subset of elements. The algorithm could be run on big data consisting of literary texts to allocate these writings to life-writing genres as much as possible. This will show the history of the genres, the dynamics of their appearance, and their expansion, regression, and merging. Algorithms based on the model would enable readers to find more writings in specific genres or subgenres otherwise not defined by the usual bibliographic search engines.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis with title Autobiography, Biography, Memoir, and Letters: Redefining the Genres of “Life Writing” for Both Women and Men I submit for assessment is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my thesis.

Brno April 29, 2021 ....................................... Tagrid Morad, B.A., MSOB, M.A.

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To my parents, thank you for all your help and for always believing in me and pushing me forward. You are my role models, and I am thankful for having you as parents. I love you.

NušNuš, the most complex creature globally, has been my loyal companion and I miss her dearly.

This dissertation was written at a difficult time. Serious family illness, world pandemic, war, personal unemployment, and life crisis encompassed these times. I wish us all health and better times ahead.

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# Introduction

My father, a physician, received medical journals by post during my childhood and teenage years. I never showed interest in them because I could not understand all those big, fancy scientific words jumping out of the pages, and there were many of them. I simply brought them home and put them on the coffee table. If there was an attractive picture on the cover page or a title that was understandable, even when it had to do with health issues, I would probably have a look at it or show some interest because I was a curious cat. The point is that through the years, I learned that a person could connect to a story; and if that story makes someone tick, it will sell. This is also why I became a medical writer. I wanted to provide my fellow humans with approachable, understandable scientific knowledge and to make it more accessible to them.

When I obtained my literary and medical writing education, I realized that there are different audiences to address. A medical writer is a hybrid composer, using writing skills as a vehicle to bring science to the lay or scientific audience. Their work is characterized by process and outcome while sharing a different mix of art and science. A medical writer should write scientifically when writing for the scientific community, providing mainly facts and statistics. But the layperson needs more context and narrative to digest the hard scientific facts given. Therefore, this dissertation’s original idea grew out of my interest in raising awareness of works of art within the scientific community while reflecting specifically upon the significance of ethnographic autobiographies to the field of science

My curiosity in these texts cultivated out of arguments that the well-known cultural and medical anthropologist Margaret Mead has been making throughout her career in works such as autobiography, letters, and biography. Such works invite both the lay audience and scientific scholars who are interested in academic achievements that happen outside of their field of specialization into the conversations and debates that surround them. These works include new insights in medical ethnography and cultural studies to entertain or challenge scientific arguments. Mead’s autobiography Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years (originally published in 1972), which is under study here, is a continuation of her work as an anthropologist, ethnographer, multidisciplinary expert in cultures, and well-trained autobiographer. Reading Mead’s autobiography led me to examine it from the reader’s point of view as art and science.

In the beginning, I knew that Mead was an anthropologist but was more often defined as a feminist icon. I expected that her autobiography would be feministic too, more gender-oriented, and involve more disclosure of personal life. But I embraced the advice of my supervisor, Dr. Martina Horáková, made in her comment on my first research paper (dated January 9, 2018). I learned that I should consider the possibility that perhaps Mead was thinking less about gender when she wrote her autobiography and instead focus more on the collaborative nature of her work.

Deepening my knowledge in literature during my Ph.D. studies led me to see the complexity of Mead’s autobiography and life-writing issues. James Clifford writes how famous anthropologists of the early twentieth century—including Mead— saw themselves as researchers and writers in a more artistic sense (as quoted in Ingridsdotter and Kallenberg 2018, 58). For many reasons, autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, and letters are not a compendium of the personal life of the subject given in the story, and it is not only the lapse of memory that leads to this incompleteness. Rather, it is the author’s choice and methodology used. Individual factors, for instance, affect the contextual factors and vice versa, following a timeline where a “wave of influence” developed and led to the growth of canon and the eventual making of a historical figure and change maker.

One event in which Mead describes how she was served kava in Samoa reminded me of my mother’s short story. As a Czech woman, she worked as a teacher for years at a Bedouin school and often recalled an event similar to Mead’s: “A special meal was served at the ‘Fadua’ ceremony to banish evil spirits, where the order and the way of serving were unfamiliar to me. My experience worked!” Her stories could reveal the path that anthropologists take. They are aware of the context they work in, and they remain vigilant about themselves within that context. Moving from culture to culture reminds me immigration, while an interplay of diverse factors affects an anthropologist’s methodology. As Mead’s autobiography reveals, many determinants played a role in reconstructing her life story, making it difficult to recognize it as either art or science. Art and science create a continuum that reflects a great complexity. Canon and genres are influenced by the mutual complexity of the relationship between art and science. The underlying problem is apparent: a new model is required that will consider a genre as a complex system. This model should bring together several related concepts from different perspectives to explain or give a broader understanding of the research topic: Is Mead’s ethnographic autobiography more scientific or literary?

Much scientific content could go missing in literature or the literature could disappear from the books of science if we categorize a text without considering different aspects of it. The absence of texts in each discipline reduces the impact they can have on a community of readers. Providing a case study for a literary form that includes scientific content shows how art and knowledge coexist in our verbal and written forms. This study will contribute to the way we search for literary or scientific texts and hopefully, a new search machine will result, allowing people from any discipline to extract their needed information from multiple sources.

Before introducing and explaining the proposed analysis model, I will wrap up part one by giving some necessary background information on the research topic, providing explicit information on life writing, the complexity brought up by these genres, and Margaret Mead. In part two, I will review the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study and explain the core concepts. In part three, the analysis procedures and findings will be presented, and I will tackle the results of the qualitative analysis and discuss it. Finally, in the last part, conclusions will be drawn and suggestions for future research will be provided.

# Life Writing

I define a “narrative” as a literary form and a social and cultural construct, presenting our state of cognition and evolution as human beings. A narrative is connected to our identity, and any harm to our identity, such as memory loss, could have implications. Any kind of breach in our reality is followed by attempts to fix it and restore a sense of order. Such renewal can be done through life writing that recovers the past’s truth and seeks to accept the meaning of our history, even the more complicated events. Thus, trying to make sense of what happened to us and who we are, a self-exploratory process, is a significant motive for engaging in such writing. Secondly, I use Gerard Steen’s comprehensive multidimensional schema to describe literary genres, reviewed in 2002. In this case, the characteristics of a literary genre will, according to Steen, “include function, mode (speech vs. writing), medium (record, print, Internet), channel (acoustic vs. visual), code (singing, melody, or rhythm in music), form (story structure/tone), discourse type (narrative, exposition), and also domain, content, register, and style” (quoted in Sinding 2010, 113).

The present connotation of genre, which goes back to the nineteenth century, is “a style or category of painting, novel, film, etc., characterized by a particular form or purpose” (Chamberlain and Thompson 1998, 1). Genres, by definition, are spoken or written forms that enhance the ability of humans to interact, exchange information and ideas, and work together. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (1981), the taxonomy of genres is far from being clear and definite mainly because the genre’s definition is fuzzy and dependent on dynamics related to social, cultural, economic, cognitive, and historical complex factors. She claims that redefining genres has always been attempted for many reasons such as those involving the emerging, blurring, and merging of new genres related to the micro-dynamics of culture and society.

Genres develop across time because the human experience changes with new social circumstances and demands. James L. Peacock and Dorothy C. Holland (1993) provide additional features to a literary genre, claiming that the narration of the “self” changes with circumstance; and that discourse, form, and context exist not only as a source of information but also to show how the self becomes the discourse (368). Peacock and Holland reflect how humans act, respond, and connect in ordinary conditions and provide meaning to these conditions; the later are flexible and creative forms and provide a platform for presenting ideas to readers. From the reader’s point of view, genres clarify what to expect from a text and what a document will provide. Knowing what genre to use and its conventions helps the writer to establish what information to present and what not to offer.

When Covid-19 almost broke the internet, it felt like a passing phase, perhaps. I did not realize the power a pandemic would have on our lives. It was the end of February 2020 when people started to speak in Israel about a virus. Then I learned that it is contagious. I was frightened. We were in a state of lockdown. But the world did not completely stop. Podcasts were airing and are still airing. It was only logical that there would be many podcasts on coronavirus updates from various BBC or CNN channels. But in this cloudy world, I found comfort knowing that I was not the only one looking for stress-relief podcasts—categories such as fitness, society and culture, and education aided in relieving some very nerve-racking thoughts and provided a means of escape. The message was clear: It does not matter how the product of our life is wrapped. What is important is what our life does. By reading the same autobiographies or hearing the same podcasts, people can search for different things, for different needs and expectations, just like asking the genie in Aladdin’s lamp.

I claim that life writing as a phenomenon can be compared to podcasting, which is used to reach a wider audience. Audiences use this media to gather information on what is happening globally (McClung and Johnson 2010, 85). Podcasts have a shared feature with life writing, and it is related to its “socialization function” (85). Like life writing, podcasting aims to produce a buzz on people’s issues, leading to a particular interaction with others that will provide meaning. Although podcasting is an online format, it acts as a rich source of information and tries to transform a range of attitudes in different cultures, which life writers attempt to do as well.

Life story narratives include historical aspects. They contain information that could be taken as facts, but they cannot be considered factual history regarding a particular time, person, or event (Smith and Watson 2010, 13). They include viable points into the subjective truth, meaning the authentic details provided are intertwined with several rhetorical acts that come from the narrator’s perspective. These accounts may aim to refute other written or told life stories, perhaps to settle past deeds or provide cultural context, among others (13). Suppose a narrative diminishes these rhetorical aims and shifts its perspective to focus on factual history alone. Such a story will not emphasize the genre's richness, which could provide us with cultural, political, rhetorical, literary, and ethical multidimensional layers of knowledge.

Life stories are based on the author’s memories, revisiting different events in time and place. They reflect how the author experienced history and provide the perspectives of other participants, not necessarily leading characters. Author Israel Rosenfield claims that a recollection of memories is a type of perception, and different contexts can shift the nature of what is reminisced (as quoted in Eakin 2020, 24). Thus, it is not only the author’s choice on what to include in their narrative but also the state of memory. We need our memories to write a life story, and this fact presents the relationship between the narrative and our consciousness state (Eakin 2020, 30).

An author’s travel through time also exposes the historical transformations that occur in culture. There is a connection between the self and the outer world in life writing genres. Thus, it is only proper to refer to life writing as “a referential art,” analyzing these texts concerning the reality that happened outside the pages (Eakin 2020, 41). History affects the author’s agency and precisely how they use their writing space and reflects the limitations and critique imposed on them during their era. This is significant because different life writers could provide different modes of self-narration. And as time passes, writers find ways to address these limitations by constructing alternative methods, each with its unique features. Currently, there are approximately sixty genres of life writing that have been defined, with characteristics, although it is possible to presume that there have been more over the centuries (Smith and Watson 2010, 253).

Storytelling requires practice. Children learn to express themselves from an early age, and their voice evolves by gaining more experience. Storytellers forge to shape their narratives through different forms, or genres, expressing different levels of emotions, passions, and thoughts in their stories. These as well reflect the cultural influences on the writer. Life writers provide various perspectives, interpretations, and meanings to different events because their behavior, psychological development, and beliefs differ.

In autobiographical texts written by an author about their life,the author is present in the text and is aware of their experience, not only as a participator but as a witness (Eakin 2020, 15). The fact that these genres of life writing reflect identity growth also contributes to our understanding of human development, and more specifically, the interplay between the individual’s nature and the surrounding culture that influences the personality by affecting the mental and physical health. An individual’s nature involves biological/genetic predispositions that have an impact on human traits, such as physical appearance or personality characteristics; the sociocultural environment in which the author grew up and lived, which includes childhood experiences and the way the author was raised and nurtured; and social relationships. I believe that authors are confident that their identity is continually changing. Therefore, we should read these life stories differently from other kinds of stories because they reveal step-by-step the developmental stages of the narrative’s subject.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Drawing from Paul John Eakin’s “What are we reading when we read an autobiography?”, I concluded that the answer to this question is quite extensive, especially when considering the broader context to which the genre of autobiography belongs, life writing (2020, 2).

## Historical Perspective on Life Writing

Historically, life stories were told orally, passed on from generation to generation with mild alterations. Life writing in the eighteenth century was equivalent to biography, and biography included autobiography and other autobiographical writings. The term biography was first mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, coined by John Dryden in 1683. But autobiography was mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary* only later by Robert Southey in 1809. Charles Berryman claims in his work that the word autobiography was coined even earlier, in 1797. In 1976, Thomas Cooley considered it to cover an author’s accounts of their experience. The Anglo-Saxon used life writing in the eighteenth century, parallel to biography. During the nineteenth century, classifications such as memoir and life were popular; however, scholars and editors started to use the term autobiography to promote one genre that will cover all the “writing[s] about the self” (Berryman 1999, 72).

This became a complex issue because autobiographies and novels shared aspects attributed to fictional writing, making it hard to distinguish between the two. They both have a plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so forth (Smith and Watson 2010, 9–10). Due to this reason, many novels were considered autobiographical narratives. Novels included an intimate first-person account of a protagonist who was not the author, providing personal history and the subject trying to make sense of how their past influenced them. These stories represented the *bildungsroman* (from German) tradition. This literary genre focused on the protagonist’s psychological and moral growth from youth to adulthood in literary criticism. It was expected that the leading character would transform in the story. This attitude continued into the twentieth century, where many novels were also written as first-person autobiographies. But this perception shattered throughout the twentieth century. With the emergence of the great modernists, such as Thomas Mann and Virginia Woolf, a novel was no longer considered an autobiographical narrative because it did not promote notions of broken selves and hostile societies in the twentieth-century coming-of-age narratives.[[2]](#footnote-3) Furthermore, without the author being the protagonist, it was hard for the reader to establish a trust relationship and identify the story as an honest account. Thus, it was necessary to distinguish between the novel and autobiography and recognize the latter as a text written by the author about the author, as self-reflexive or autobiographical, that requires the author to dig deep into their personal memory archives and write about it (11).

In 2000 another change in terminology occurred. The term life writing started to be used as an all-encompassing term for the diversified genres, modes, and media of nonfictionally delivered storytelling and self-presentation, especially across the North American scholarship (Smith and Watson 2016, xxi). The development of self since the second half of the twentieth century, as expressed in literary forms, turned out to be more fragmented than the conventional depiction of the whole. Thus, the “exceptional typical” that life writing promoted focused on marginalized groups of people, using their autobiographical pieces as authentic documentation without critically examining these sources (Renders and de Haan 2011, 35). There are several reasons for this change, a few of which follow:

* Autobiography has been long connected to the Enlightenment tradition and was considered in the past to be the intellectual property of the white Western man. But the times changed.
* The term autobiography was criticized for not being inadequate for self-presentation modes because they were not all in the form of the conventional autobiography, such as the slave narrative, immigrant stories, non-binary stories, women finding-their-own-voices narratives, life stories of illness and disability, autobiographical comics, and so forth. On the other hand, life writing is more flexible and can include these forms.

Now, life writing includes genres that present a unique mix of art and science, such as ethnographic autobiography, narratives that unfold stories of different cultures within indigenous or developing-global settings, and literary forms that speak about notions of women’s experiences. It includes biography and autobiography but also personal genres like letters and diaries. A biography has now been defined as a “contemporary form of life writing as well as its capaciousness, variety, and experimentation” (Smith and Watson 2010, 9). Life writing texts can be written by literary men and women or by nonformal writers. If it is the latter, the text will be considered “nontraditional literature” and could include personal narratives, oral narratives, life statements, and anthropological life histories (Behar as quoted in Kadar 1992, 5).

Marlene Kadar writes that life writing “is best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms from the so-called least fictive narration to the most fictive” (Kadar 1992, 10). To determine the position of autobiography, for example, on the spectrum of continuity of life writing, different interrelated determinants orchestrate the narrator’s development. Contextual factors (social, cultural, historical) synchronously act on the development of the narrator from childhood to adulthood. Kadar, in her work, writes that there had been attempts to define and redefine what precisely is life writing. And she provides two views: The first sees life writing “as a limited and limiting genre, as it was in the eighteenth century,” which includes the less exclusive genre of personal kinds of writing like biography, autobiography, and personal genres such as letters and diaries (3). The second view resolves these constraints. This is a so-called extended version of the term, “identified according to its subject matter —women’s texts, personal narratives” (5). Kadar speaks about life writing and its genres but does not emphasize its boundaries, its literary or scientific character, or the different attributes related to the narrative and the writing process.

Contemporary life writing, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “has become a storehouse, a remarkably flexible set of discourses and practices for adapting voices, claiming citizenship, traversing space and place, witnessing to violence, confronting grief, resituating embodiment and sexuality, chronicling addiction and recovery, feeding hungers, imagining nature, and negotiating celebrity” (Smith and Watson 2010, 165). Because of its emphasis on marginalized narratives, it can attract gynocentric criticism. Life writing also includes a range of blurred and multiple genres, leaning towards more objective truth.

Nowadays, there are ample reasons for the interest in self-narration, defined by Mary Jane Kehily as the processes and the ways through which people use narratives to construct individual identities, that is personal narratives of storytelling and autobiography, primarily in social media (1995, 23). Arnaud Schmitt explains that “self-narration is a form of autobiographical writing that focuses on the self—as opposed to the more classical life narratives—,and more precisely on the construction of identity, mostly through a reflection on the inner workings of memory and how the latter is deeply entangled with the sense of who we are. Thus, self-narration is the narration of the self as an ongoing process underpinned by selected memories” (Schmitt 2019, 658). According to Schmitt, “self-narration defines an intention that is not linked to a label (a memoir can fall under this category, for instance), and yet also confines this intention to narrating the self, and not life in general. Thus, many autobiographies or memoirs do not qualify as self-narration” (661). Therefore, I chose to use the term life writing, which can accommodate personal accounts that are not strictly only about “one’s identity” (662).

# The History of the Genres of Life Writing

Any inquiry into the origins of life writing will lead me to historical perspectives linking the creation of this genre to different times and across cultures. However, in my introduction to the theme of life writing, I claim that life writing is part of who we are, and it evolves as our state of consciousness develops. For me, this view places life writing ultimately to that specific moment when each person begins to speak and practice their language and provide daily narratives on “how their day was?” (Eakin 2020, 4, 13). Today, it would be even more complicated to trace the concept of life writing because of online self-narration. While it shares the same incompleteness issue as conventional offline life writing, online self-narration has different views on a life narrative. There is a lot to explore in this specific digital age, as some critics argue that digital life stories vary from the written kind—the path to the current state of life writing genres involved various approaches and attitudes as well.

Life writing genres reveal history and culture as lived (Peacock and Holland 1993, 367). They are “self-referential . . . narratives of autonomous individuality and representative lives” (Smith and Watson 2010, 203). Autobiographical writings can be used as a source of historical facts. In his recent work, Jaume Aurell (2015) argues that “autobiographies by historians may become valid historical writings (that is, both true narratives and legitimate historical interpretations)” (244). Life writing genres also reflect one’s perspective about the past.And most importantly, they embody a creative aspect. They are a form of art rather than history according to Georges Gusdorf, and a person writing an autobiography, for example, engages in a creative/artistic project (as quoted in Olney 1980, 43). Carolyn G. Heilbrun claims that women who wrote letters in the past discovered their identity through this form because they could “find a life that lets them make their art” (as quoted in Pollitt 1988, xv–xvi). Redefining self-narratives from seeking the truth about life to a process of creative self-engrossment enabled the elevation of autobiography to a position of a literary genre (Smith and Watson 2010, 203).

## Biography

Dwight F. Reynolds in his work “Interpreting the Self” focuses on biographical accounts that were written before his time. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, an Egyptian scholar, wrote an autobiography, not as we know it today, in 1485. His work is important because it provides a scholarly argument for presenting one’s life. He claims that “these self-authored (and therefore presumably reliable) texts will be available to later writers who may use them in their biographical and historical works” (2001, 3). This argument reflects the development that has occurred since then because a space has been created to discuss the value of truthfulness and creativity that these works hold.

Abdulmajeed al-Baghdadi (2016) focuses his work on various types of biography found in Arabic literature. From the translated abstract, I learned that this type of literature is old-new. Old Arabs knew it from the period before Islam, but it had a different shape to it. The art of writing a biography was not confined to only biographers or historians. Still, it appeared in other forms and diaries with personal and psychological characteristics, autobiography, and altruism biography, with less focus on social and political aspects and more on other attributes of life.

Two Greek words compose the term biography: bios, meaning life; and graphein, to write. In Latin, the word is biographia. These words were used during the Hellenistic period.

Thomas Fuller made the first mention of the word “biographist” in 1662. Dryden coined the term biography in 1683 and Addison followed in 1715 with biographer; William Oldys in 1738 first used biographical.

Samuel Johnson in *Dictionary* defines a biographer as “a writer of lives; a relater not of the history of nations but also the actions of particular persons” (as quoted in Winslow 1995, 9). Edmund Gosse defines biography as “a faithful portrait of the soul in its adventures through life” (as quoted in Winslow 1995, 9). So, the focus is on a person’s actions and life from the narrator’s perspective. The self is depicted by another, who considers themself legitimate and enlightened enough to provide an account of another person’s life.

Biography is used to confirm history. And over the years, more confirmative biographies were published. The word biography was used until the word autobiography was constituted (in 1797) and included the self-written life. So, the genre was ethical until the end of the eighteenth century, but now biographies are often imitative. Clas Zillacus touches on this ethical issue and explains that the biographer is usually led by his or her intention to release and liberate an untold story. The biographer does not possess any loyalties to the subject of the work. The story may contain fictional aspects, but this does not necessarily affect the narrative’s historical and cultural context, which can provide its readers with details about a specific period (1979, 97).

Lawrence C. Watson and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke (1985) argue that biography “involves more rearranging material” so that it becomes a “recorder’s report of the subject’s life” (as quoted in Reed-Danahay 2001, 408). David Cassidy writes that “every biography . . . brings together three lives: the subject’s, the author’s and the reader’s” (as quoted in Nye 2006, 326). The biographer decides in what order to construct the subject’s life and may include different elements from the subject’s everyday life. When the biographer writes about a scientist, they can “move freely from the world of [science] to the domain of art and literature. In a single day, [the individual] might return from the laboratory to care for his family, then turn his thoughts to poetry, art, literature, philosophy, politics or prayer” (Nye 2006, 326).

Elena Gualtieri (2000) writes about Virginia Woolf’s definitions of modern biography. Woolf describes its hybrid character as follows: “[t]he extremes of granite and rainbow, fact and fiction, truth and personality are not to be combined so that their respective boundaries blur and merge” (as quoted in Gualtieri 2000, 349). It is a tension that the biographer must be aware of. The reader, according to Woolf, should know history is being read and when fiction, but this turns out to be problematic because of the instability of the genre, which is mixed. Woolf establishes a frame that attempts to explain the complexities that arise from this genre:

Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible; yet [the biographer] is now more than ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act. Each of us is more Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, than he is John Smith, of the Corn Exchange. Thus, the biographer’s imagination is always being simulated to use the novelist’s art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact. (as quoted in Gualtieri 2000, 350)

## Letters

Olive Shreiner, a feminist and socialist writer and social theorist, wrote approximately 5,000 letters between 1871 and 1920. According to Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley, Schreiner’s letters changed when she returned to South Africa from Europe in 1889. She declined to focus on her inner life, which she felt her European socialist and feminist friends were too invested in—although she also took part in it to some extent. This shift influenced her letters and public writings such as novels, short stories, and essays. She reversed the convention. Instead of writing about personal matters in letters intended for her private circle of family and friends, her letters became less personal in content and contained more writings about the external world of political events that occurred within the extensive framework of feminism and socialism. In contrast, her published public writings included statements from her personal life and experience (Jolly and Stanley 2005, 96). This example does not deny that there have been or still are genres of life writing that contain various elements of other genres (100).

A letter written by Madame de Sévigné in seventeenth century France to her daughter puzzled critics. The mid-century editor Roger Dûchene claimed that Sévigné’s letter showed her to be a great mother. Bernard Bray in the 1960s used a structuralist attitude to claim that Sévigné was using her letter to manipulate the “système épistolaire,” which comprises “the material conditions of the postal system, the social functions of letter-writing in transferring information from the court to the provinces and the aristocracy’s interest in the analysis of the passions.” What we may perceive in our modern times as a private and intuitive writing, a letter of affection from a mother to her daughter, was considered during the seventeenth century a conventional, formal, well-planned letter (Jolly and Stanley 2005, 103).

During the 1980s, Susan Abbott wrote a letter to her mother. She used the letter for personal reasons to tell her mother she was gay, which was impossible for her to do in person. She lived in North America, and it was a social norm for middle-class young women to write often to their mothers or call them. This example provides evidence that some cultures promoted letter writing.

Izzak Walton and other biographers used letters in the seventeenth century to characterize their subjects. The eighteenth century experienced a boom in letter writing, and since then, letters have been used vastly by biographers.

The use of personal letters in biographies made headlines in 1668 when Thomas Sprat refused to incorporate them in his work on Abraham Cowley’s life. However, in 1742 Conyers Middleton used private letters in *Life of Cocero*, and included portions of these letters in his text. In 1775 William Mason included 130 edited letters followed by a brief narrative intermission in his work. James Boswell mimicked his method in *Life of Johnson* in 1791, which included more than 300 letters in the text. Since the late eighteenth century, letters were used as a personal form of writing, providing a platform to express emotions (a form that is dated, with the specific addressee and signatory), and as a public document addressed to a literary audience. Letters turned into a powerful tool to disseminate information, a place where social roles mattered and liaisons were guaranteed, often intermixing affection with conventionality. The writing style and methods used to circulate information differed according to gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality. Letters typically are not published broadly, but letters of acclaimed figures are, mainly to study the different modes of self-presentation.

A letter is a written form of message, and it is one of the most effective forms of autobiographical writings. The self is giving more emphasis to his or her personal life when writing a letter in private correspondence; often, a liberating sense arises from these letters. Maria Tambouku claims that individuals who compose letters “experience the paradoxical coexistence of feelings of complacence and frustration in solitude and strive to interweave contradictory and inconsistent experiences and memories into the making of a new self” (2003, 12). This is significant because letter-writing grew into a practice of self-creation. The role of letter writing in constituting self complements (or even undermines) the more formalized autobiography and memoir.Letters also play an essential role in shaping and promoting everyday communication between people, and in this way they have turned into interactive projects (Tamosiunaite 2014, 32).

When writing for a public audience, the “I” is more direct and the intention is clear. Letters could be written about career and private issues and not necessarily focus on a particular path. Personal letters are used in biographies to prove a point or unmask or unravel concealed information withheld due to personal reasons by the individual to whom the letters belong or by their relatives.

## Memoir

Paula S. Fass (2006) argues in her work that the “recent scholarship has made clear that childhood (a favorite site of memoir) and memory are deeply implicated in the eighteenth-century’s explorations of the human” (108). Fass discusses in her work several memoirs that were written in different years. She claims that each memoir provides a different self to the reader. For example, Eve Hoffman (*Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 1989) wrote about self-formation using an intercultural dialogue; Sherwin B. Nuland (*Lost in America: A Journey with My Father*, 2003) wrote about the self and how he is influenced by the absence or presence of his parents (a father in this case); and Andre Aciman (*Out of Egypt: A Memoir*, 1996) created a self as an involved observer and chronicler of the family (119). These examples show how the genre of memoir provides space for self-expression. Each author selects to present a different form of the self because each generation is engaged in other conversations with literature.

In 1709 Richard Steele claimed in the *Tatler* that “the word *Memoir* is French for a novel” (as quoted in Fass 2006, 120). At that time, publishers sought to publish memoirs, and it was commercially logical for writers to take on this form.

The historical treatment of the memoir within the history of autobiography defined this genre as a supplement to autobiography. In contemporary jargon, autobiography and memoir are used interchangeably, mainly because of their shared focus on the use of historical context. Part of a memoir’s writing process requires “recalling and recording” of a person’s life, which also applies to autobiography and biography (Smith and Watson 2010, 275).

The memoirs of The Me Too (or #MeToo) movement broke the silence about sexual abuse and sexual harassment and presented an advancement in memoir writing; they enabled people to speak out and inspired participation in movements for equality. These stories capture the era’s ethical challenges, such as public exposure and validating facts revealed by such stories.

Donald J. Winslow defines a memoir as “a record of events, not purporting to be a complete history, but treating of such matters as come within the personal knowledge of within the memory of the writer or are obtained from particular sources of information” (1995, 39). A memoir is not formally organized and focuses more on social and historical contexts than on private life, like an autobiography (39–40). It has more of a gossipy and disgraceful nature, and the subject is placed in their social environment (40). A memoir is more focused on what occurs in the subject’s surroundings (39–40). It could be the lives and behavior of other figures in the story and not necessarily that of the narrator.

Memoirs are written by known authors or up-and-coming authors. If it is the latter, the memoir acts as a vehicle to advertise the author, who becomes known through the publication of their work. When a public figure writes a secular memoir, its focal point will be the public circle, mainly recording career paths and actions with historical significance. Domestic memoirs, which are a form of personal narrative, focus on providing accounts of family life.

## Autobiography

Dwight Reynolds and his team of researchers claim in their publications that Arab-speaking lands have a tradition of autobiographical writing that goes back to the ninth century; and between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was an accepted literary genre with its own features (as quoted in Lunde 2015, 434). For example, Ibn al-Adīm, an Arab biographer and historian from Aleppo known for his calligraphy and scholarship, was asked by his friend Yaqut to provide an account of his life to be included in a dictionary.[[3]](#footnote-4) Ibn al-Adīm wrote ten papers with an account of his family, upbringing, education, and career. Yaqut integrated some of it while citing Ibn al-Adīm directly but fused it with some materials from his research and additional sources. This is an example of an autobiographical work inserted in a biography (Lunde 2015, 438).

Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani (d. 1449), the composer of a biographical dictionary dedicated to the lives of the qadi’s of Egypt, wrote an entry about himself in the third person. This is a case where an autobiography is concealed as a biography (Lunde 2015, 438). It did not include, however, personal feelings.

Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), a North African historian, wrote a memoir about his life and incorporated it at the end of his extensive life’s work, *The Book of Examples* (*Kitāb al-‘Ibar*), about the Berber regimes that ruled North Africa (Lunde 2015, 438). In his memoir, he describes how he witnessed the Black Death in North Africa and Europe in 1348, killing between 30 and 50 percent of the population (438–439). He lost his parents and many relatives. In *Muqaddimah*, the introduction to *The Book of Examples*, he emphasizes the existing danger of crowded cities numerous times (439). Khaldūn argues that these cities generated plagues (439). He provides the Nomads examples, who lived in desert areas and seem unaffected by urban illnesses (439). The memoir offers a context and a contra to what he later argues for. But not all Arabic autobiographical texts are combinations of genres. Two memoirs by “men of the sword” that are recognized as autobiographies exist in copies. The primary one is the *Tibyān* by ‘Abd Allah ibn Buluggīn, the Zīrid ruler of Granada (*regnat*,from the Latin, ruled1073–1090) (440–441).

Franz Rosenthal, in his work “Die arabische Autobiographie” (1937), analyzes different autobiographical materials by Arabic authors about themselves from the start of Islam until the sixteenth century C.E. Rosenthal did not include, however, several works of al-Jabarti, 'Ali Mubarak, or Mikha'il Mishaqa from the nineteenth century, or the Arabic autobiography par excellence, Taha Husayn's *al-Ayyam*, which had already been published (Philipp 1993, 574). He explains his decision as follows (from German translation):

None of these autobiographies arose from the awareness of the value of the uniquely personal aspect of life; those autobiographies, especially, which are more than just a vita are written for objective purposes. (as quoted in Philipp 1993, 574)

Fedwa Malti-Douglas noticed another issue. The difference between classical and modern Arabic notions of literature is evident in the precise definition of modern autobiography: “the literary text ceases to be an expression of collective norms and becomes a personal work” (Malti-Douglas as quoted in Phillipp 1993, 574). But it should be considered that there was perhaps a difference between what authors perceived as appropriate to publish then and what is now (Phillipp 1993, 575).

Marie Bláhová wrote about autobiography in the Czech Middle Ages. According to her research, Middle Ages autobiographies were unusual in Bohemia and other countries in the Latin cultural circle. It was possible to find only three autobiographies written in different social contexts showing a distinct literary type within two centuries of the late medieval period: First, Charles IV's autobiography, where he reflected upon his life as a Prince. The function of this text was to show how a monarch should behave. Second, the autobiographical letter of former Archbishop of Prague, Jan of Jenštejn, in which he discussed his faith as part of a broader scheme to emphasize the result of his loss in politics. Finally, Christoph of Týn, an unimportant gentleman during his time who later secured accomplishments in the Emperor’s army and diplomatic services. He composed an autobiography for his offspring on how to achieve success in honest ways and why they should never be ashamed of their roots (Bláhová 2016). Although the autobiographies are subjective, they each had different aims (Bláhová 2016).

Three Greek words comprise the word autobiography. Georg Misch defines autobiography as “the description (graphia) of an individual human life (bios) by the individual himself (autos)” (Smith and Watson 2010, 195). Autobiographies date back to ancient times, although the term was first used in 1797 by William Taylor in the British *Monthly Review* and again in 1809 by Robert Southey.

There have been efforts, according to David Reisman’s work on “Medieval Arabic Medical Autobiography” (2009), to connect Ibn Riḍwān’s work *The Philosopher’s Way of Life (Kitab al-Sira al-falsafiyya)* with the autobiographical genre.[[4]](#footnote-5) Still, this claim was later refuted, stating unawareness or unwillingness to recognize Ibn Riḍwān’s type of self-presentation as nonautobiographical. Ibn Riḍwān is not a familiar figure in contemporary scholarship. Only in 1937 did Franz Rosenthal publish a short report on his autobiography in “Die arabische Autobiographie,” where he noted that Riḍwān did not provide a complete description of the outside events of his life (as quoted in Reisman 2009, 561). But Rosenthal’s evaluation of the text offers a short analysis that recognizes Ibn Riḍwān’s work as belonging to a different genre than the one identified by modern authors as autobiography. According to Watson and Watson-Franke, an autobiography should be “self-initiated” (as quoted in Reed-Danahay 2001, 408). Rosenthal’s observation of Ibn Riḍwān’s text confirms that he had no intention for the *sīra* “to be read as an independent ‘tell-all’ report about his life” (as quoted in Reisman 2009, 562). Instead, it was supposed to be read as an utterance (e.g., a speech) designed to instruct and persuade regarding the study of medicine. It became one part of his more extensive work *al-Kitab al-Nafi fi l-Tibb*. Here, he writes about the proper way to study medicine and its ethical, practical, and theoretical dimensions (Reisman 2009, 562–563). Thus, the *sīra* as part of this more extraordinary piece was shared within the medieval medical literature, which fundamentally copied the Galenic tradition. Any personal notes added by Ibn Riḍwān in his work were efforts to gain esteem. The work contains expository interpretations of classical Greek ethical, medical, and philosophical works. There is no evidence of the accuracy of the historical facts that Ibn Riḍwān added in his text, meaning there is no suggestion that the work belongs to the genre of autobiography as we know it (563). According to Reisman, the same can be said when searching for autobiographies in Greek literature, from which Ibn Riḍwān took his example.

In the beginning, a successful autobiography in Western civilization represented the relationship between the writer and the public sphere. Public figures depicted what was considered then a true autobiography, and they represented the life of “the great man” (Smith and Watson 2010, 195). These texts located the man and his actions in a particular historical and cultural background. They analyzed how his actions became “representative,” while others were often banned from cultural construction (196). Throughout the 1960s, scholars settled on a collection of texts used as the basis for autobiographical studies, including narratives of self-exploration, confession, and self-discovery. This time, the autobiographer was defined as “an autonomous and enlightened ‘individual’ who exercised free will and understood his relationship to others and the world as one of separateness” (199).

Autobiographies were typically written later in life, looking retrospectively on public or career paths while showcasing a development. The author would also write about private life, his or her deeds, intellectual activities, and relationships with others—some experiencing a normative life. In contrast, others were insurgents and stirred new ways in their cultures. The assumption was that the writer would reach a resolution at the end of their autobiography by reflecting on past achievements.

The autobiography was later defined as a “subcategory of the biography of great lives and acted as moralists of sorts, evaluating the quality of life lived, and the narrator’s telling of that truth” (Smith and Watson 2010, 200); and in this case, focusing more on the bio than the auto. The autobiographical subject gained attention, and a new understanding of the notions of self and truth emerged. First, the “I” (the self) became universal (200). Secondly, linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and the Russian Formalists showed how complex the medium of self-expression is, claiming that the individual is influenced by “culturally dominant knowledges” (201). The subject is not in complete control, and their consciousness is played and defined by external forces, relationships, and ideologies. Thus, the concept of self turned to be quite problematic during this period because it was finally acknowledged that it could not provide the pure truth of the self. Truthfulness is not achieved, and writers face a challenge in establishing their identity without amplifying their subjectivity.

The fact that autobiographies are interpreted differently today presents a shift in attitude towards freedom and identity. It encourages open dialogue on past historical norms and influences the writing and reading of autobiographical texts. The issue of neglected and marginalized autobiographies has been a subject of attention over the past fifty years, as scholars work on restoring and reassessing these works (Smith and Watson 2010, 199).

PhilippeLejeune’s classic definition of autobiography is a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (as quoted in Lindemann 2018, 525). What differentiates autobiography from other genres of life writing is the “Autobiographical Pact.”Lejeune coined this concept in 1971, and it is conceivably one of the essential and elementary foundations establishing what defines an autobiography (as quoted in Allamand 2018, 51).It distinguishes autobiography from fiction and biography. The definition separates autobiography from other genres by using structuralist theory to focus on the readers’ believability in such texts. This can be accomplished through a pact between the author, the reader, and the publisher, following specific criteria; in the piece, the author’s name should appear on the title page and be the same as the main character’s name (Huff 2019, 447). Feminist critics, however, criticized this concept in the 1980s and 1990s because it did not touch on the issue of gender. Thus, autobiography remained linked to the Western tradition, where successful autobiographies were written only by great white men. Leigh Gilmore argued for a change and advanced the concept of “autobiographical real,” which presents reality and truth that is simply put out “there” (as quoted in Huff 2019, 447). This addition to Lejeune’s concept achieved reader believability in autobiography without questioning the origin, location, and representative of the autobiographical texts. According to Lejeune, the text can be written in the first, second, and even third person. G. Thomas Couser takes this a step further and applies Lejeune’s autobiographical pact to create a tripartite model, an in-between mode, which he describes in the following way:

On one side is solo autobiography, in which the writer, the narrator, and the subject (or protagonist) of the narrative are all the same person; at least they share the same name. On the other side is biography … in which the writer and narrator are one person while the subject is someone else. In between, combining features of the adjacent forms—and thus challenging the commonsense distinction between them—is as-told-to autobiography, in which the writer is one person. Still, the narrator and subject are someone else. (as quoted in Lindemann 2018, 526)[[5]](#footnote-6)

This model extends the “central point in both directions to form a continuum capable of … first, second or third grammatical person” (Lindemann 2018, 527). Several variables decide where on the continuum the work will be located. First, the level of responsibility the author is willing to take when it comes to the content produced. In comparison, a writer is someone who simply writes. So, the level or degree of “writerly intervention” decides whether a particular text is a biography or autobiography (526). Couser’s model expands the middle ground, in which the continuum also distinguishes between “celebrity autobiography, in which subjects outrank writers,” and “ethnographic autobiography, in which writers outrank subjects” (530).

## Ethnographic Autobiography

During the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, Arabic-speaking Christians—Chaldeans, Maronites, and Melkites—wrote first-person narratives. Some were very lengthy travel accounts and described the authors’ experiences in foreign lands. Archdeacon Paul, the son of Melkite Archbishop Macarius III of Aleppo (today Hungary, Romania, and Russia), accompanied his father and wrote his accounts. During this era, Ilīyās ibn Hanna, a Chaldean Christian from Baghdad, also wrote a travel account based on his journeys in Italy, France, Spain, Peru, Central America, and Mexico. Both versions include abundant personal information and observations written in a simple and direct style (Lunde 2015, 449).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the first to discuss the relationship between autobiography and anthropology. While writing about other cultures, he argued that he is the one who can genuinely represent himself and thus created “a new brand of personal ethnography” (as quoted in Blanchard 1993, 72).

There are two familiar types of research: quantitative and qualitative—and the latter is becoming the most popular. Qualitative research is used by researchers, students, and policymakers (Brewer 2000, 5). Robert Walker in 1985 emphasized the significance of “applied qualitative research” in policy issues and policymaking (as quoted in Finch 1986, 402). A researcher who chooses to focus on qualitative research is concerned with interpreting his or her data analysis. The researcher is more reflective, focusing on explaining probabilities in the research process, which forms the basis for gathering data. Ethnography is a data collection method that assists in understanding people’s social meanings and activities in a particular location or environment. Ethnographic research will apply in-depth interviewing, participant observation, personal documents, and exploration of natural language. Ethnographic research is used in social sciences. Historically, although the term “ethnography” was not used adequately until the twentieth century, the form of data collection about certain countries, groups, or cultures goes back to antiquity and developed into the established concept of “travellers tales.” Used for decades, this concept mainly describes the traveler’s reflections on particular observations or relationships within his or her society (Brewer 2000, 11). L. L. Langness and Gelya Frank use the *Oxford English Dictionary* to define ethnography. It is not fieldwork but rather “the scientific description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference … Generally it is a written description of another way of life” (1978, 18).

Ethnography later emerged in Britain and North America. Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, and Edward Evans-Pritchard were the founding fathers of the classical tradition of social anthropology in Britain. In this case, social anthropology was associated with colonialism, as the British Empire sought to understand the cultures and groups it was to rule, specifically obtaining knowledge on how to incorporate these cultures and groups within the “British family of nations” once the colonial conquest ended (Brewer 2000, 11). In the 1920s and 1930s, a participant observation research (a term used by sociologists, it refers to an ethnographic approach; the study is conducted in the same way) was used in the United States by the Chicago School in Sociology, presenting the second wave in the use of ethnography. The focus was on marginalized groups of urban industrial society, among them “deviant subgroups, like prostitutes, drug dealers, street gangs, various unusual urban occupations, such as taxi dance hostesses, jack rollers, janitors and the hobo and relatively unknown social roles, like those of flop houses and burlesque halls, Polish immigrants, Jewish ghetto culture and the culture taxi dance hostesses of the slum (as well as that of the wealthy Californian Gold Coast elite)” (12). William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki studied Polish immigrants in America (Fairchild 1922, 522). Ruth Landes concentrated on a study of the Ojibwa culture (Cole 1995, 3).

The investigators understood the value of “real research,” first-hand observation, if they wanted to provide a “cultural description” (Brewer 2000, 12–13). Years later, ethnography was already being used in education, health studies, and social work, and its focus in all these disciplines was on providing “description[s] of things foreign, exotic and peculiar” (Brewer, 13). According to Brewer:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, to collect data systematically but without the meaning being imposed on the externally. (Brewer 2000, 6)

Christopher Pole and Marlene Morrison argue that “ethnography has become, if not the dominant, then certainly one of the most frequently adopted approaches to educational research in recent years” (Pole and Morrison 2003, xii). Yet, its popularity in different fields did not solve a significant problem: there is still no agreement on what exactly forms an ethnographic study. The word ethnography has been used interchangeably with qualitative research. The book *Ethnography for Education* did define the concept of ethnography for those who decide to use the method in an educational context: “Essentially, ethnography seeks to make sense of social settings and social behaviours from inside, privileging the perspectives of the people involved in the situation that is the focus of the investigation” (xiii). Many who engage in the field of ethnographic research would agree with Pole and Morrison’s following statements about the nature of ethnographic research:

1. The assortment of detailed information will help analyze ethnographic data: a data collection that begins in the field and another event afterward.
2. A complete and examined outline of the social processes (activities etc.) in a specific place, event, or backdrop. These texts should be rich in depictions so the person who reads them will feel like they are there.
3. The picture described is documented by someone from the inside (the researcher), providing their perspective on the subjects’ social actions that the study examines. Thus, this group’s social acts are of tremendous value and a priority, but it does not entirely avoid the insider’s perspective on the events seen.

In-depth research in which the emphasis allows exposure to the location, case study, or event complexities. This emphasis aids in understanding social actions.

Besides these notions, ethnographic research accomplishes other objectives. It can influence policy, practice, and change concerning the lives of subjects in the study group. However, these abstract characteristics of ethnographic research, and they can change according to the information found and how well the societies are understood (Pole and Morrison 2003, 3–4).

According to Lesley Graham, scientists are undertaking the task of writing an autobiography because they find it essential to their work (2004, 3). In addition, scientists write their autobiography because they have something to say and feel no one else could write it. Some even compose an autobiography because they find it a suitable tool to refute and prove some claims. Graham claims that “the aim of scientific autobiographers may also be to make priority claims and gain recognition and prestige both inside and outside of the scientific community” (3). It is inevitable to compare the motives for writing a scientific autobiography with those writing an anecdotal autobiography. But the last explanation of engaging in such writing—to become an acclaimed figure outside the subject arena in which the scientist belongs—is distinguishing this genre and emphasizing the rewarding effect of such autobiographies in addressing a broader audience, not just scientists.

During the 1920s and 1940s, cultural anthropology in the United States sought to become a collaborative field for writers, musicians, filmmakers, dancers, and scholars from heterogenous scholarships. Franz Boas led a generation of students, including Margaret Mead, Edward Sapir, and Ruth Benedict, to produce a vast mesh of contacts with to work on different projects and engage in debates about social issues and create methodological concepts. This collaborative effort built a groundwork related to culture and art ideas, which resulted in rapid crisscrosses and transactions of knowledge between the artistic and anthropological fields. Elias Norbert defines this work style as the notion of “creative figuration,” a system in which both anthropological aspects and works are embroiled with artistic ones (as quoted in Chakkalakal 2018, 490). This analytical concept highlights how each field, art and anthropology, overlaps and why it is becoming a practical educative approach to gathering information. In this specific case, it could be suggested that such knowledge production leads to depth in anthropological works.

Silvy Chakkalakal claims that concepts and motifs that conventionally seem to oppose one another could be recognized as entwined: “reason-imagination; art-anthropology; poem-ethnographic prose; art-facts and ideas; the other-the self; and the individual-culture” (2018, 492).[[6]](#footnote-7) This interdisciplinary approach evolved into ethnographic autobiography as we know it today, which became popular in the social sciences in recent years.

The anthropologist David Hayano introduced the term autoethnography in 1979. According to Harry F. Wolcott, he used the word to “describe his then current project, an ethnography of people like himself who spent their leisure hours playing cards in Southern California’s legitimate card rooms” (2004, 98). Hayano found the term suitable for research where the study subjects share a joint activity with the researcher (98). Hayano, who indeed spent much of his time in the poker room, decided to write about it, but “as a true insider, in contrast to the more customary role in which the anthropologist is, at best, a peripheral participant” (98). But the phrase autoethnography found itself separated from what Hayano intended it to be. And besides being relevant for studies in which the researcher is also the participant, it was also applied for “the study of oneself, with or without a group in tow” (98–99). At first, “autoethnography” focused mainly on the auto, the self, while ethnography was “added to validate a method” (99). The result was personal narratives or diaries that were very serious and personal. They lacked a form, and they did not belong to any discipline. This new format, according to Wolcott, was problematic and confusing (99). He proposed using instead the term ethnographic autobiography, which Stanley Brandes introduced in his work “Ethnographic Autobiographies in American Anthropology” (1979).

Brandes defines ethnographic autobiography as “one major form of the life history … Usually, to be designated ethnographic, an autobiography is recorded and edited by a social anthropologist, or by some professional with interests closely allied to social-cultural anthropology” (1979, 2). It is a first-person narrative, a life history that provides real stories about real people, relating intentionally to the author’s life story (2). The studied informants usually do not belong to the Western culture. If the subject is considered Western, it will be a type of person that does not hold the capability to write an autobiography. The protagonist of ethnographic autobiographies is “a commoner, an ordinary member of his or her society, whose individual achievements are not noteworthy in and of themselves” (2). This is what, according to Brandes, distinguishes ethnographic autobiography from autobiographies. What they do have in common is that they both provide “various psycho-social facets and developmental stages of an individual’s life” (2). It is still possible, however, to find works that deal with autoethnographies even today. Still, the term is used interchangeably with the term ethnographic autobiography. It is possible to notice the exchange of words according to the definition provided by researchers in their papers.

According to Sherry Marx, Julie L. Pennington, and Heewon Chang, autoethnography is a qualitative method of probing. Still, its purpose is “to translate the personal into the social science research realm with unique first-person representations that are accessible to readers both within and outside various communities in the global context” (2017, 2). It is a blurred genre that leans on varied qualitative traditions such as “ethnography, narrative, *testimonio*, phenomenology, and critical identity theories” (2). Among autoethnographies, it is possible to find narratives of race, gender, culture, and so forth. It is necessary to note that some autoethnographies are not recognized as belonging to this specific genre, and consequently several steps assist in evaluating a text as autoethnography. First, the genre’s nature and its flexibility to include artistic and scientific elements allow the ethnographer to work with it to accomplish their aims. The content may be written as analytical, poetic, emotional, resonant, and so forth if it serves the author’s purpose. The author can also share with the audience details of research analysis and what influenced the research process while providing good literature and reflecting on how personal stories can connect to the broader sociocultural background. By doing so, the author brings science closer to an audience that perhaps never understood or learned science. It is no wonder this genre is trending among ethnographers. In recent decades, some scientists, such as cultural geographers, became more interested in experimenting with creative writing in their field, imitating ethnography’s artistic world (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 179). But what is considered as an advantage is also recognized as an Achilles heel. Its flexibility means that the genre has no established boundary or format. Thus, the account provided can be questioned, especially when it comes to its truthfulness.

Reed-Danahay (2001) writes that ethnographers in the past could not present themselves and with others in photographs, biographies, life histories, and autobiographies (407). It was known that an ethnographer would provide intimate details of the individuals’ lives under study (in this case, the informants). Still, the personal self-discloser of the ethnographer was not expected. Ruth Behar explains that anthropology exists historically to “give voice” to others, and therefore it was forbidden for the ethnographer to self-reveal (1996, 26). The fact that ethnographers gradually took part in writing about others and their private lives turned problematic because it blended humanistic and scientific validity when focusing on individuals. In recent decades, the autobiographical ethnography genre impacted how we view the relationship between ethnography and the self. According to Reed-Danahay, in “autobiographical ethnography, … professional researchers incorporate their narratives into their ethnographic texts” (2001, 407). In these accounts, we could expect a “self-inscription on the part of the ethnography, the ‘native,’ or both” (407).

James Peacock and Dorothy Holland (1993) argue that there are two approaches to life stories. The first emphasizes life: It provides the reality outside the story, or the story is expected to present the reality and help the reader understand the fact portrayed within it. This is the so-called “life-focused” approach (368). According to the authors, an “external reality” is more significant than the story itself (368). This approach identifies two ways to treat a life story: the first provides an entrance to the “objective facts of historical and ethnographic events, the other as a view of the subjective experience of the narrator” (369). Peacock and Holland found a way to merge these two approaches into one. They use the term “processual,” in which self-narration is considered a central knowledge, but also the self and other narrated experiences are given a philosophical rank: “The telling of life stories, whether to others or self alone, is treated as an important, shaping event in social and psychological processes, yet the life stories themselves are considered to be developed in, and the outcomes of, the course of these and other life events” (371).

According to Reed-Danahay (2001), this approach to life narratives discarded early on the traditional objective versus subjective separation that is prominent in life-history research, such as ethnographic autobiographies (409). Mary Louise Pratt (1986) writes about the problem of connecting ethnographic scientific authority to personal experience and individual expression: “I think it is fairly clear that personal narrative persists alongside objectifying description in ethnographic writing because it mediates a contradiction within the discipline between personal and scientific authority, a contradiction that has become especially acute since the advent of fieldwork as a methodological norm” (32). But personal narratives such as ethnographic autobiography play an essential role in this impossible relationship. They mediate between fieldwork and “the self-effacement called for informal ethnographic descriptions,” and insert to some degree ethnographic content into the ethnographer’s personal experience (33). Such texts are worth reading, and they were not discarded by science because they present the side that was not yet dehumanized by the traditional ethnographic description.

These first-person travel accounts are not strange to us. They have existed in Europe since the early sixteenth century. Unfortunately, these texts were criticized for being too descriptive and not fitting into the narrative, so authors found various ways to incorporate both methods into their writings: “the conventional ordering-narration first, description second; or narration superordinate, description subordinate” (Pratt 1986, 35). Both modes were accepted equally in the late nineteenth century, but travel books resulted in two separate volumes. Modern ethnography is established on a premise that interweaves the narration-description duality, although ethnography distinguishes itself from travel writing. Ethnographic writing connects narrative to description; but personal narratives are familiar sometimes as separate volumes and sometimes as refined forms at the beginning of a book, providing the needed information or background for what is to come.

# Unsolved Issues in Life Writing

Albert E. Stone defines autobiography as “simultaneously historical record and literary artifact, psychological case history and spiritual confession, didactic essay and ideological testament” (as quoted in Berryman 1999, 80). The word “simultaneously” is significant in this case, as it attempts to resolve all the genre’s critical definitions and create a comprehensive canon for the study of autobiography (Stone as quoted in Berryman 1999, 80). Stone presents the genre of autobiography as “stubbornly multidimensional,” and the limits of its truth takes toward science or art (as quoted in Berryman, 80). This science or art dilemma separates critics into three groups: those who favorably approach autobiography as “fictions of the self,” those who argue for its scientific “truth” component, and those few who try to take the center (Berryman, 80).

During the twentieth century, “autobiography was left in limbo between the departments of history and literature” (Berryman 1999, 73). In 1972, James Olney did not view autobiography as a literary genre; instead, he explored its “philosophy and psychology” (Olney as quoted in Berryman 1999, 78). During the eighties, any work of literature was considered a social and political act. William Spengemann in 1980 tracked forms of autobiography in terms of history, philosophy, and poetry. Peggy Kamuf in 1988 declared that “autobiography is an all-inclusive genre” (Kamuf as quoted in Berryman, 75). Paul John Eakin’s edited collection of essays, *American Autobiography, Retrospect and Prospect* (1991), in which he attempts to “offer a comprehensive picture of the state of the field today” (Eakin as quoted in Berryman, 81). Based on this collection, Berryman concludes that “autobiographical criticism … follow[s] directly from the politics of race, class, and gender” (Berryman, 81). The nature of the genre remains uncertain.

## Subjectivity and Objectivity in Life Writing

Life writers are mainly concerned with putting together fragments of fact to create a unitary picture of the self that manifests their experience. The author designs different real-life events to fit their self-presentation account from the position of a first-hand source. Thus, a central condition for life writing is subjectivity. It is essential to differentiate between two types of subjectivity, however. One is related to accounts written by an individual about their personal life. The other refers to texts written by authors about another’s individual life. In both cases, there are certain limitations. Life stories embody errors and distortions that are easy to detect; readers can quickly notice this by comparing different records. This is significant when examining a text’s authenticity.

Practicing biographers have much knowledge and, of course, a lot to say about the subject they are writing about; otherwise, they would not attempt to expose another person’s life. They know what their subjective input can bring, which turns their work into a sensitive matter. On the one hand, it can be considered a meaningful intervention from the biographer’s side, contributing knowledge about a subject that would not be possible to obtain otherwise. On the other hand, such details can disclose information about a subject’s life that they were not willing to disclose. Kadar (1992) writes about the importance of preserving objectivity when writing about another individual; in other words, the writer should not infringe upon the subject’s self and hijack his or her story, but rather provide additional layers of information to the story from different perspectives (4).

This leads to another kind of subjectivity: when an author is writing about themself. Henry Adams claims that autobiography could be viewed as “a mere shield of protection in the grave” (as quoted in Eakin 2020, 44). From this point of view, when the autobiographer writes about his or her life, it is to intimidate other biographers from writing about it. But biographers do not care much about this act of appropriation and instead seek to register their truth. An autobiography will be taken, in this case, merely as another source of information. Such a statement claims that a feud exists between biographers and autobiographers. But it is not always about that. When an autobiography has already been written, the reader is instantly provided with certain aspects about the autobiographer, their time, culture, and so forth. The work of the biographer can only enrich our understanding by unfolding more details on the self’s consciousness of that time; more precisely, the work will “reconstruct the reality of selfhood: what was it like for this person to be conscious then?” Relating this question to topics of gender, social status, career, place, and time could even draw information on the state of the individual’s health and their experience with health issues (Eakin 2020, 48). This is significant and valuable knowledge for future advancement. It is also not always proper to use the word rivalry when it comes to biographers and autobiographers; the two come from different perspectives. Biographers craft their work because they are inspired by the person they write about. They consider the autobiographers’ work incomplete when it comes to creating an icon. And it is entirely logical that an autobiographer will not be altogether immersed in showering compliments on their work; otherwise, the account will be criticized for its condescending tone.

## The Question of Truthfulness

The complexity of the countless variations of the self results in the realization that the most trustworthy details that the genres of life writing can offer are related to the history of a life, which is embedded in the text rather than about the individual itself. Only then will it be the author’s account, which is directly available to us as readers. Suppose we are to search for the more trustworthy aspects of such works. In that case, there is a need to dig deeper and look for contextual details and meanings that are not only about the “I”—the subject of the piece. Digging deeper will allow historical reconstruction of the past in addition to the preliminary idea of defining a form of life writing as a valuable source of information about the author’s earlier life (Eakin 2020, 45). And eventually, such a reading will credit the author for writing or rewriting the past, documenting, and recording events that perhaps were left forgotten.

Some life writing genres deal specifically with the self’s external world, while others focus on the self. Lee Quinby claims that “whereas autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The ‘I’ or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and . . . dialogical” (as quoted in Smith and Watson 2010, 274). The autobiographer’s inner life reflects their personality and the time they lived in connection to their involvement in lives of others’ and the circle in which they moved. It is not the aim of this genre to branch out of its scope, and it is more challenging for the reader to investigate the external forces.

Life writers, such as autobiographers or letter writers, write their stories as self-presentation. Still, a diary of a disabled or gay person will not depict just that specific individual’s life. It will also provide details about people with disabilities and homosexuals worldwide, no matter their historical background.

## Ideology

Life writing is a global phenomenon, and life writers can be found in various disciplines, such as cultural studies, gender studies, comparative literature, sociology, and psychology, examining individual lives by looking into autobiographical texts (Renders and de Haan 2011, 35). However, it is crucial to notice that most of the personal “ego documents” are produced by life writers who have been victimized by society (35). Thus, life writing is not so macrocosmic, and there is an ideological agenda according to Renders Hans and Binne de Haan, which is to “accomplish [the] self-imposed task to correct history” and impose how the world should look (35, 39).

Life writing, I discovered, is carved into our identity. We create it under certain conditions in which we live, and some stories are told, others are not, and there is a reason for that. But our concept of what life is about is not something determined by us. The process of life writing and the final product we achieve, be it an autobiography or other form of life writing, retraces the trajectory of forces—economic, political, cultural, and social—that influence our self and subsequently our life and the life we write about. When we read a life story, we take part in humankind’s story and what makes us human. We go back to our early roots, traditions, cultures, and global stage, we learn to connect the past and present and think about the future. Mead, before her death, talked about an archive in which she planned to preserve materials and documents, for “‘our children and our children’s children,’ as the Iatmul so often say, would be able to link years past and present to a new future” (Metraux 1980, 268). Each era brings different types of life writing, and it is up to us to decide which to use for our own needs.

# Research in Life Writing Genres

## The Role of Memory

Our mental state is comprised of sensations, emotions, and ideas that exist at a specific time in our consciousness and then cease to exist; however, they are still being stored in different blocks of our memory. We can recall these memories and reproduce them voluntarily or unwillingly. With the help of our will, we can discover these memories. Sometimes, memories can appear spontaneously, even years later and without any act of will. There are also occasions when we cannot put our finger on a specific event, but we know indirectly that what we are going through “now” is somehow identical with “then” (Ebbinghaus [1885] 2013, 155). Memories occur under the “laws of association” (155).[[7]](#footnote-8) However, memories differ from the present experience, according to Herman Ebbinghaus: “Differences in the *content* of the thing to be produced are of great influence. Melodies may become a source of torment by the undesired persistency of their return. Forms and colors are not so importunate; and if they return, it is with noticeable loss of clearness and certainty” (155). Ebbinghaus argues that “every mental content gradually loses its capacity to being revived, or at least suffers loss in this regard under the influence of time” (156). A person writing an autobiography or a biographer relying on records written by his chosen subject cannot rely on memory alone, as memory cannot claim to be scientifically complete. “He who learns quickly also forgets quickly” (156).

## Research in Autobiography

Autobiographies written by anthropologists can provide information on the conduct of field researchers, the problems of the writing genres, and specific issues such as memory, text editing, relationships between researchers and informants, and so forth. Autobiographies can be used as a methodology and agenre. The particular focus is on the “truthfulness” of ethnographic reports and “representativeness” (Franceschi 2014, 161). Autobiography written by an anthropologist was considered a nonconservative but creative fieldwork method. Many American female anthropologists who were students of Franz Boas wrote autobiographical accounts of their lives as scientists, single women, and mothers. According to Zelda Alice Franceschi, “the *auto and bio graphic* *lens* was for them a device to understand themselves and others, an instrument of knowledge, reflection, and involvement, a daily practice which enabled them both in diaries and in their letters from the field, as well as in more general autobiographical writing, to reflect on their choices and their work” (162).

Franceschi (2014) claims that, in a way, their desire to share parts of their lives—scientific, academic, and family—was a calculated attempt to leave traces of their genealogies for future generations in which they “tell a *story of their own*” (162). An ethnographers’ autobiographical writings, such as autobiographies, letters from the field, diaries, and field notes, are valuable tools that contribute to understanding the development of a theory or model and its discovery. Some of these texts remain private because they are messy and complex, as they were written in the heat of a moment of reflection. Diaries record problems of researchers, and sometimes the ideas that are described are vague. Bronislaw Malinowski and Ruth Benedict had a personal diary. They recorded private events that had nothing to do with fieldwork but were still connected to it in some measure. Published diaries are the product of editing, which distinguishes them from biographies and autobiographies. The latter were written to be shared, and thus the author can manipulate the details and choose what to make public. The following two autobiographies written by female scientists present some complex yet common features:

Mead, in her autobiography, “chooses, cuts, separates, splits and then sews together, mends, recomposes. Her critical reflection is profound” (Franceschi 2014, 169). Readers noticed that her autobiography differs from biographies written about her. Biographers’ extensive analyses present the gaps in her autobiography, especially parts related to her personal life. This could be due to her public role in America and worldwide when she wrote her autobiography, which influenced her choices, even in writing. She was a woman dedicated to her work. As Nancy C. Lutkehaus states, “Mead as Modern woman, Mead as Anthropologist, Mead as Scientist, and Mead as Public Intellectual Celebrity” (Lutkehaus as quoted in Franceschi, 170). When Mead’s autobiography discusses her choice to study anthropology, she also provides details on the history of anthropology, the history of women anthropologists who were working at Columbia, and the history of fieldwork methods (Franceschi, 173). This results in a new type of autobiography that combines history, anthropology, womanhood, and motherhood: non-linear and full of omissions. Linearity deserves more elaboration and that will follow. By producing an autobiography, Mead argues in favor of considering all elements that occur during the creation of scientific work.

Barbara Wootton (1897–1988), a remarkable social scientist who worked at the academy for forty years, including eight years as the Head of the Department of Social Studies at Bedford College, University of London, wrote an autobiography titled *A World I Never Made* in 1967. Ann Oakley (2010), who read her autobiography, noticed the silences and gaps as if it was a “carefully crafted account of a rational life” (430). Wotton was married twice, and she provides a short account of these marriages in her autobiography. She lived with two women, Leonora Simeon and Barbara Ruth Fuessli Kyle, but they are unmentioned in the documentary evidence of the Wootton archives. There are no letters; in photographs, these women are unnamed. They are, however, mentioned in Wotton’s autobiography but without any reference to the kind of relationship they had with her. Perhaps Wootton was bisexual. Modern biographies would tend to delve into the subject’s sexuality. But for the sake of this discussion, what is significant is whether autobiographies written by scientists can be taken as reliable sources on the events of the autobiographer’s life? Is it enough to obtain an incomplete disclosure of a person’s life?

According to Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, “writing the life of someone who has written at least a partial record of their own life adds other layers of complexity” (as quoted in Oakley 2010, 434). Biographies and autobiographies do not offer a “compendia of facts, but constructed narratives; these offer a coherent retrospective life story which has been manufactured from the actual fabric of a life” (Oakley, 434). Simply said, it is not the function of either genre to provide completeness, and it is up to us to search for techniques to measure the authenticity of different details. Oakley, in her work, names a few steps towards this direction. She also explains that Wootton removed personal items from her archives and autobiography to control the material that will be accessible to future biographers.

## Research in Biographies

The word “scientist” appeared only in 1834. It was claimed that texts about individual scientists belonged to the Victorian era; however, literary biographies go back over 300 years (Holmes 2012, 498). According to Thomas L. Hankins (1979), most of the old history of early twentieth-century science, from which many were taught, was mainly biographical (2). These biographies included “a series of illustrious names, each followed by birth and death dates, an occasional anecdote, and a description of that person’s ‘discoveries’” (2–3). Nowadays, modern biographies search for social, political, and economic determinants that perhaps influenced the process of science, and they pursue “connections between scientific thought and concurrent philosophical and religious movements” (3). It is left for the psychoanalytical historian to look for the origin of science, but they also search for forces that are mostly cultural (3). Biography “provides the cross-sectional view. . . . It also gives us a way to tie together the parallel currents of history at the level where the events and ideas occur. . . . We have, in the case of an individual, his scientific, philosophical, social, and political ideas wrapped up in a single package. This package will most likely contain contradictions, blind spots, and irrelevancies” (5). The biographer will learn that the philosophical and social influences on a scientist’s work are “annoyingly complex and uncertain” (5). Biographers “agree that the life and work of a scientist should be narrated by integrating the subject’s scientific contributions into the relevant social contexts” (Kragh 2015, 269).

Scientific biographies, written by professional historians of science, are a modern creation and have existed since the 1970s. But there are also great biographies written by journalists or non-academic authors and even science writers. And while these biographies are often written about well-known scientists, some are written about more minor figures. These texts raise scientists from the level of anonymity in which they prevailed and give them their respectful place within the history of science (Kragh 2015, 275). Ethics in such works plays an essential role. Only recently was it considered necessary to balance a subject’s contributions to science with the dilemmas that the scientist faced during their long career (275).

Biographies about Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein are famous, and new ones are continually published to satisfy readers’ needs. Currently, writing scientific biography “show[s] us the human face of science: the motivations, setbacks, serendipities and moments of enlightenment in the quest for knowledge” (Holmes 2012, 499). Janet Browne explains the popularity of biographies about historical, scientific figures: “[their] stor[ies are] the stor[ies] of the era” (as quoted in Nye 2006, 323). Biographies that integrate the subject’s science provide more information to their readers “about the politics of science practice and the cultural formation of natural knowledge” (Nye 2006, 323).

Biographical life writing is described as “journalism, art, a literary endeavor, fiction, history, science and sociology” (Oakley 2010, 427). The question that arises in this case, according to Mary Jo Nye (2006), is, are these “books about the scientist or … about the science?” (324). I believe this question relates not only to biographers who write about scientists but to scientists who write their autobiographies. Both encounter the dilemma of assimilating pure science with professional and private life into one book that will be readable (324). But it turns out that the focus in such works should not be the aspect of technical science. To a specific degree, biographies provide details of technical, scientific history when writing about an individual who fulfilled the roles of scientist, activist, and more. This claim is evident especially during the recent modern period, in which more biographies explore “scientific work and institutions, social history, and politics with considerable, but hardly exclusive, attention to the technical science” (325). Often biographies focus on answering questions related to moral guidance, values, and public righteousness. They examine issues such as how to behave as a scientist and make the right decisions regarding scientific work (325). Readers learn from these texts about a public figure’s achievements and failures and how or why these happened. Such books accomplish the historical task of “interpreting the changing character of scientific practice, as well as the specific character of individual scientists” (329).

Olesia Iefremova, Kamil Wais, and Marcin Kozak (2018) refer to “biographical items” and “items about an individual” as items that are “obituaries, articles focusing on the life of an individual, and articles that are tributes to or commemorations of an individual” (1696). In 1998, both items were joined into one category, *biographical articles*. These articles celebrate the lives of unique figures. They honor scholars, artists, and others who played a role in developing science or literature. Several features appear in obituaries: family background, education, career, professional and personal qualities, and achievements. This type of biographical works resemble scientific life-writing.

A recent study conducted by Bruce Macfarlane and Roy Y. Chane (2014) managed to find, through NVivo software for textual analysis of obituaries, the scholarly and personal characteristics that intellectual leaders hold. Still, some open questions remain unanswered concerning the changes that biographical articles underwent over the years. In their study, scholars describe how they had to create a particular category for “atypical biographical articles” (Iefremova, Wais, and Kozak 2018, 1700). They called them “Other.” For instance, articles that focused on scientific knowledge, with some addition about the people who developed it, did not fall precisely into biographical articles. A thorough examination showed that there had been misclassification of papers done by Web of Science (WoS). Previous studies on obituaries examined articles that appeared in popular media, but no one analyzed biographical articles published in scientific journals. This is quite shocking as there seem to be many of them, and there is a need for further research on scholarly journals indexed in WoS. And while their biographical essence means that they can’t contribute to science creation, they are still powerful because they are about “the excellence of human mind” (1715).

## Research in Narratology

Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa define narratology in the following way:

Narratology is, etymologically, the science of narrative. The term was popularized, however, by such structuralist critics as Gerard Genette, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince and others in the 1970s. As a result, the definition of narratology has usually been restricted to structural, or more specifically structuralist, analysis of narrative. The post-structuralist reaction of the 1980s and 1990s against the scientific and taxonomic pretensions of structuralist narratology has resulted in a comparative neglect of the early structuralist approaches. One positive effect of this, however, has been to open new lines of development for narratology in gender studies, psychoanalysis, reader-response criticism and ideological critique. Narratology now appears to be reverting to its etymological sense, a multi-disciplinary study of narrative which negotiates and incorporates the insights of many other critical discourses that involve narrative forms of representation. (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 1)

The first to focus on narrative structure was Aristotle, who established that plot (*mythos*) is the main element in a literary work. Thus, a narrative in its broad view means “a work with a plot” such as tragedy or comedy, and the more specific definition would be ‘a work with a narrator’ (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 1–2). Nowadays, narratology studies are concerned with narrative aspects of literary and non-literary genres and discourses which are not recognized as rigorously narrative, such as advertisements (2). However, there is a need to distinguish between “a work with a plot” to what constitutes a narrative “proper” (2). Linguistic narratives such as history, the novel, and short stories are narratives mediated by the discursive activity of a narrator (2). There could also be other kinds of mediacy: In film, the camera is the mediating tool. But different mediums and genres require different presentations of the narrative, using various perspectives, different levels of narratorial interference, and different approaches of time. Therefore, each narrative medium needs its own analytical approach to narrative structure and level. Onega and Landa define a narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way” (3). Narratives can be written or verbal, they can be visual images or acting, or a combination of these. There could be many kinds of narratives: linguistic, theatrical, pictorial, and filmic. If the medium includes a point of view, a selection, or a perspective on the represented object, it is a narrative. Onega and Landa write that:

Narratological analysis concentrates on those aspects of textual production, structure and reception which are specific to narrative: for instance, the study of plot, or the relationship between action and character portraiture. Narrative may of course be approached in other ways: historically, thematically, stylistically, archetypally, deconstructively. (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 4)

Narratology is related to structuralism. The work of the Russian formalists early in the twentieth century promoted the idea that “a work presupposes conventions, other works, styles, genres, structures of meaning which go beyond the work itself” (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 4). Their contribution is significant: “they aim at devising a general science of literature (narrative) capable of describing the systematics of literary forms and also of literary evolution. Form and function are intrinsically related: literary forms, for instance, may become worn and give rise to new forms (parody) while their previous social function is taken up by originally minor forms that evolve and come to the fore” (23–24). The French structuralists continued to work on this definition of literature during the 1960s and 1970s. In this sense, narratologies would be addressing the question of how to analyze the structure of narrative? How should we begin? The preliminary point of view would be to examine a narrative as “the representation of a series of events” (5). Each event can be studied in relation to its position and with respect to other event/s (5). However, a narrative is not only about the events, it is also about the “representation” of these events. Thus, their depth is to be examined: a narrative should not be taken as it seems to be, but instead we should look for its significance through the process of interpretation. This is the so-called “*hermeneutic* direction in narrative analysis” (5). Richard Walsh explains in his work that a narrative “is the type of discourse characteristic of stories,” but is also concerned with a mode of thought that has a specific form and logic (Walsh 2018, 12). Thus, a narrative “is a basic way of making sense that is central to our ordinary engagement with the world and each other” (12). Walsh writes that a narrative “is a mode of cognition, a distinct form of sensemaking with its own specific and limited range of affordances” (12). Narrative cognition helps us to understand, to make sense. He defines the concept in the following way: “**Narrative is the semiotic articulation of linear temporal sequence**” (12). According to Walsh, to articulate means to “*produce* significant form and, in doing so, to *express* it at the same time” (18). Semiotics, a concept that was coined by Charles Saunders Peirce in the late nineteenth century, is defined as “the study of signs and systems of signs and the production of meaning” (18). By “semiotic articulation,” Walsh means that a narrative is a way of meaning, not a kind of occurrence. Articulation suggests “a cognitive process” through which pattern and order are created and give meaning to the text (17–18). Narrative cognition is “**perspectival**” (19). Walsh explains that a narrative is written under certain circumstances, immediate experience, and the perspective of narration which may be withdrawn from cognition (19–20). Some forms of narrative can manipulate their perspective by “representing the narrative act itself (character narration) or by partially aligning the narration with the perspective of a character (focalization)” (20). Narrative acts can be a subject of interpretation when prolonged across “space and time,” and there is a chance for a serious change in perspective that reflects a narrative development. This narrative analysis deals with a “non-chronological relation between the time of the telling and that of the told” (20).

A narrative requires a specific form—“linear temporal sequence”—not a subject matter or purpose (Walsh 2018, 12). It is “a basic cognitive mode of sensemaking that creates meaningful form with a specific temporal logic” (2). But interpretation can result in complexity because different patterns in processes can be viewed differently, especially when raising the following questions: “In what way are the events represented? In what way is the narrative similar to or different from the events it represents?” (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 6). A narratological observation will constitute many answers.

Furthermore, a narrative analysis will involve two levels of analysis: “If narrative is a semiotic representation of a series of events, one level of analysis will examine the events represented. Another level of analysis will examine the structure of the representation” (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 6).

Different kinds of narratives are also characterized as non-linear, which could manifest itself in two ways: the first has to do with the assemblage of events in a narrative which may not produce a single continuous sequence (referred to as non-linearity in narration), or the events narrated may not conjoin as a sequence (meaning the non-linearity of the narrated). These could be narratives that recount a non-chronological sequence of events, for example. As alternative forms of narrative, non-linear narratives are mainly described as narrative that deters and subverts narrative, especially because logic requires a firm linear narrative that enables the reader to advance gradually from point to point. The non-linear produces “changes in two (or more) related variables [that] are not directly proportional to each other” (Walsh 2018, 16). Non-linear systems are complex.

A narrative text is an example of discourse, “the use of language for communicative purposes in specific contextual and generic situations, called *discourse situations*” (Onega and Landa [1996] 2014, 8). There are written fictional discourses and general written discourses. Readers and critics may interpret the text differently and provide new meanings. But for their interpretations to become legitimate and valuable, they need to be defined in a specific discourse situation—they need to be based on previous experience or observation, and they require evidence. The process of interpretation is not linear; “it does not proceed neatly from one level of the textual structure to the next. Instead, there is a constant feedback between interpretation of the action, of the narrative structure and of the textual subjects” (11).

Comparative narratology has taken on interdisciplinary direction, which offers more possibilities for development and often transcends beyond narratology (Onega and Lande [1996] 2014, 25).

# Complexity in Times of Linearity and Continuity

Knowing that autobiography is analyzed through many disciplines and offers historical, social, political, gender, and more critical views, educator L. S. Vygotsky’s (1896–1934) sociocultural theory can be used as an intermediate stage to the life-writing model that I propose. According to Vygotsky, social, cultural, and historical contexts play a significant role in developing a person’s learning and intellect, which represents the scale of continuity in a person’s life and narrative. Activities and institutions are dominant in this development. Vygotsky’s model is “holistic” and it incorporates language, symbols, and historical timelines to understand “human activity-in-context” (Panofsky 2012, para. 4). Barbara Rogoff explains the following in her book, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (2003):

In contrast to theories of development that focus on the individual and the social or cultural context as separate entities (adding or multiplying one and the other), the cultural-historical approach assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, its social and cultural-historical context. According to Vygotsky’s theory, the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part. (50)

Mead stressed the relationship between the individual and culture based on her research. She was aware of the developmental issues and intentionally addressed these in her study and autobiography. In *Coming of Age in Samoa*, she writes the following:

But meanwhile another way of studying human development had been gaining ground, the approach of the anthropologist, the student of man in all of his most diverse social settings. The anthropologist as he pondered his growing body of material upon the customs of primitive people, grew to realise the tremendous role played in an individual’s life by the social environment in which each is born and reared. One by one, aspects of behavior which we had been accustomed to consider invariable complements of our humanity were found to be merely a result of civilization, present in the inhabitants of one country, absent in another country, and this without a change of race. He learned that neither race nor common humanity can be held responsible for many of the forms which even such basic human emotions as love and fear and anger take under different social conditions. (Mead 2001, 5)

Vygotsky’s theory is based on research that includes many determinants of diverse character in many contexts during different developmental phases. But this initial model of complexity, as proposed by Vygotsky, is not enough to analyze autobiographies that are chaotic and nonlinear. His model speaks of a chronological developmental scale of a person’s life without considering complexities that might arise in autobiographical texts for different reasons.

# The Complexity of the Genre of Life Writing

According to Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, the scale of continuity of ethnographic autobiography represents “a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration and ethnography” (as quoted in Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang 2010, 3). The amount of each variable depends on the ethnographer and their aims. Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez, and Heewon Chang (2010) claim that “autoethnographers pay varying levels of attention to narration/description and analysis/interpretation of autobiographical data” (3). The scholars state one interesting characteristic of ethnographic autobiography: “Autoethnographers explore a wide range of experiences, some purely personal and others in relation with/to other participants of research projects” (5).

James Olney explores in his work the “creative” nature of life narratives and claims that these texts create “metaphors of self” (as quoted in Stone 1973, 164). He was interested in theoreticians such as Montaigne, Jung, Eliot, and sometimes Newman, who wrote that “autobiographers [are] ‘complex’ because they both re-create their own selves through metaphor and establish a philosophy, psychology, and poetics of the autobiographical act” (Stone 1973, 164). But Olney was inspired by artists as well. He believed, according to Stone, that a “universal creative impulse … is by nature truthful and successful” (as quoted in Stone, 164). Everything that is fundamentally subjective and done by a man is an autobiography (Stone 1973, 164). According to Olney, “philosophy, cosmology, psychology, history, and all art are necessarily ‘imitation and creation of the self’ ” (as quoted in Stone, 164). But these broad statements about autobiography are challenging when it comes to defining autobiography as a literary genre (Olney as quoted in Stone, 164–165).

According to Signy Sheldon, Can Fenerci, and Lauri Gurguryan (2019), and Eva Svoboda, Margaret C. McKinnon, and Brian Levine (2006), autobiographical memory is considered a complex set of operations, including episodic memory, emotions, execution, semantics, and self-reflection.

The journey to the holistic understanding of life writing would begin in the “world making” suggested by Jerome Bruner (1987, 11). He claims that it is the principal function of the mind in science or art (11). His article in *Social Research* addresses a lengthy relationship between culture and autobiography. Moving further to discuss forms of self-narrative and offering four subtypes of it, he concludes his paper with suggestions for structuring experience (31). In the final words of his article, he writes that “life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (31). Bruner cites Georges Gusdorf’s argument that a special historically conditioned metaphysical condition was needed to bring autobiography into existence as a literary form (16). Perhaps a metaphysical change is required to alter the narratives that we finally accept as our life’s story (16). This, however, does not explain the complexity that is brought about by the genres of life writing.

The previous historical review of the development of life writing genres across centuries and cultures, the inability of theories and models to resolve controversies and disputes, and the lack of multidisciplinary models encompassing the minute and broad concepts of the life-writing forms lead us to believe that a new approach must be adopted. In this case, the complexity theory of Mitchell M. Waldrop (1992), Ton Jorg (2011), and Jennifer Wells (2013) would be promising, as Andrea C. Valente (2017) suggests. Valente claims that “non-linear interactions between an autobiographical ‘self’ and its environment” could provide new insights.[[8]](#footnote-9) The recent developments dictated by information technology, media, and transculturality make reality even more complex. Valente argues that autobiography is undergoing a shift “from a genre to a self-organization model with its sub-types featuring complexity and hybridity.” Under new circumstances and due to this process, the autobiographical self becomes a “complex entity”. Valente continued to claim that the autobiographical self transfers into an agent category that is self-organized and interacting with other “agents and actants,” meaning other “humans and objects”. She discusses the issue of “interconnectivity and intertextuality” as nodes in rhetorical ecology, allowing the author to get involved, act, and react from inwards outwards. A new century is characterized by media platforms producing a “networked self” that designs narrative of performance as “nodes of rationality and intertextuality” emerging organically in the public circle (Jolly as quoted in Valente 2017). Autobiography becomes complex and undetermined, nonlinear, and flexible.

To be hybrid, genres of all kinds would blend, mix, and combine; and its recognition as a genre must have common features (Mäntynen and Shore 2014, 738). By adding hybridity, this blending, mixing, and shifting gains another layer (740). In the beginning, the genre has a “typicality” of what is considered “typical” to a specific form, which scholars have established in this field; or it has “prototypicality,” which is derived from our knowledge based on past events and refers to our “idealization” of conceptual properties (740-741). But what we consider typical and prototypical of the genre is related to the idea of hybridity. So, the characteristics of genres are inherited from previous ones that were or are blended and mixed. In this way, we perceive the genre to be typical when it could be a blended text (741).

Another approach to viewing genres is recontextualization. And while hybridity provides a macro view of the genres, recontextualization is micro and concerns the text in a particular genre. This term refers to “the shifting across time and space that happens in all discourses: recontextualization is the dynamic transference and transformation of some part or some aspect of a text (or text type) tied to a particular context to another text tied to another context” (Mäntynen and Shore 2014, 741). Another term is “intertextual recontextualization,” which is more specific in its meaning as it “refers to the overt transfer and transformation of specific parts of one text to another” (742). Both hybridity and intertextuality contribute to the complexities involving the genres of life writing, and they can result in texts in which the boundaries between the genres are not clear (748). This process refers to “genre mixing, blurring, bending, and hybridization.” In this case, the process of mixing different genres makes it challenging to preserve the “original genre identity” (748).

María Jesús Martínez Alfaro (1996) contributes to the discussion of intertextuality. She claims that “there are always other words in words in a word, other texts in a text … the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system” (268). Imitation and intertextual practice are used (269). But then, how do authors maintain originality? Alfaro claims that it is “only by multiplying and fragmenting his/her models can the individual writer assert and maintain his/her independence” (270). Montaigne argued “that the ‘self’ is to be found in a distancing of the reading and writing subject from the anterior ‘other’ ” (Worton and Still as quoted in Alfaro 1996, 270). This view follows Harold Bloom’s concept of “anxiety of influence” (as quoted in Alfaro, 270).[[9]](#footnote-10)

What is clear is that narratives constantly change and expand. The past is no longer “as it was,” going back to Bruner’s argument at the beginning of this discussion. Instead, the practice of intertextuality proposes “a view of literary works as crowded with layered images and multiple reflections and unexpected relationships” (Alfaro 1996, 271). On the one hand, we have writers who re-write past works by using intertextuality, and on the other, writers who “*consciously* imitate, quote, plagiarize, parody … extensively” (271). The result is that we are continually “re-cycling” or metamorphosizingexisting works (271). Gerard Genette suggests a definition for intertextuality in literary texts: “The relation of co-presence between two or more texts, that is, the effective presence of one text in another which takes place by means of plagiarism, quotation or allusion” (as quoted in Alfaro, 280).

David Fishelov (1993) speaks about the relationship of recent literary works to the genre: “The writer may stretch the generic rules, he may produce some unpredictable ‘match’ between different existing conventions of existing literary genres (or even between literary conventions and conventions taken from other media” (as quoted in Devitt 2000, 700). As much as we acknowledge similarities, we should also recognize the differences in the genre:

A genre does not exist independently; it arises to compete or to contrast with other genres, to complement, augment, interrelate with other genres. Genres do not exist by themselves … A genre … is to be understood in relation to other genres, so that its aims and purposes at a particular time are defined by its interrelation with and differentiation from others. (Cohen 1986, 207)

This is a “complex interaction” (Devitt 2000, 700) according to Amy J. Devitt. But because genres are defined by their similarities and differences “texts must not only always participate in a genre but always participate in multiple genres simultaneously” (700). Successful writers were admired for “breaking” generic conventions, thus for “expanding the literary universe” (705). Again, complexity is evoked because genres tend to fluctuate, are not stable, and change because of their authors and readers, who read the text differently across time (710). There have been several attempts to provide a framework for this complexity.

The new science of Mitchell M. Waldrop, *The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (1992), is young and still not well defined. This science’s boundaries are not yet clear, but it must deal with a complexity that no other science could resolve. Waldrop (1992) claims that “the very richness of interactions … allows the system as a whole to undergo *spontaneous* *self-organization*” (11). These complex systems are “*adaptive”* and possess a kind of dynamism that makes them different (11). Waldrop writes that “complex systems are more spontaneous, more disorderly and more alive than that.” These complex systems can bring order and chaos to a new state of balance. It is called “*the edge of chaos”*. A state where the components of a system are never locked into place and never dissolve into disorder, “where life has enough stability to sustain itself and enough creativity to deserve the name of life.” This “edge of chaos” is the point “where new ideas and innovative genotypes are forever nibbling away at the ages of status quo, and where even the most entrenched old guard will eventually be overthrown.” The “edge of chaos is the constantly shifting battle zone between stagnation and anarchy, the one place where a complex system can be spontaneous, adaptive and alive” (12).

In his book, Ton Jorg addresses the crisis in social sciences and sets the new science agenda. He suggests that we should become more reflective about how we view and perform science to escape old thinking and become aware of potential new ways of knowing. In short, to link all-new thinking and make a new framework. Among others, he addresses complexity, causality, and novelty in his summary.

## Transgression of the Genres of Life Writing

Aristotle worked on finding the “essential quality of each genre,” an issue that became problematic in literary theory (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 1). In the last decades, some critics like Jameson have argued that “literary texts are composed of heterogeneous and often contradictory generic strands and discourses” (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 1). This phenomenon has been referred to as “breaking the boundaries of the genre” (Somacarrera 2000, 1) and was observed in Canadian literature by Belen Martin. It was connected to Canada’s liberation from British and American colonialism and the need to have an independent literary identity such as Mavis Gallant (1). Different works were published by writers who experimented with the limits of genre(s): collections of short stories and the novel; memoirs that intermixed aspects of journal, diary, sketchbook, and travel narrative; works that combined narrative, essay, journalism, memoir, and autobiography; and writers who practiced short story, autobiography, and essay in their texts. Canadian authors thus blurred the genres, layering and mixing them. Liminality is the way that Canadian literature has created her own literary path (8). Stories, in this case, are “characterized by [their] subversive resistance to classifications” (8). The writer’s specialty could be short fiction, but he or she chooses to expand and write essays.

This “genre transgression” is an essential factor in studying the representation of the narrative “I” (Somacarrera 2000, 2). The writer could try to include documentary details about the context of another story, but, as shown, it can be part of the narrator’s venture to provide a fragment of themself through the described background (2). Shirley Neuman in her chapter about “Life Writing” in the *Literary History of Canada* explains:

Perhaps the blurring of generic distinctions is simply the logical consequence of Cocteau’s observation, made many years ago, that every word we write is part of our self-portrait, an observation reformulated and quoted by Eli Mandel as an epigraph to Life Sentence (1981): “When autobiography ceases to be, I shall write from the point of view of a Brazilian general.” Certainly that position that all writing is autobiographical has found justification in and has also partly been impelled by post-structuralist theories which call into question the unity of the speaking/writing subject as well as the referentiality of language. (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 3)

Genre transgression goes against the tradition. The reader’s expectations are crushed. The story can be seen as “a collage of different tableaux which sometimes are not even connected” (Somacarrera 2000, 2). An example of such transgression could be evident in auto/biography or, as Claire Obaldia defines it, “a marginal and a-generic” genre, used in postmodern literary criticism to refer to narratives about women’s lives. It consisted of memories from youth and childhood, whose main characters are fictional but have common features of the writer and her own experiences (Obaldia as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 8). Liz Stanley describes this genre as “an artful construction within a narrative that more often than not employs a variety of methods which imply referentiality” (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 3). Donna Stanton argues that the auto/biographical writing is not about the referentiality but the “graphing” of the “auto,” that is, the formation of a textual self: “The excision of bio from autobiography is designed to bracket the traditional emphasis on the narration of ‘a life’ and that notion’s facile presumption of referentiality” (Stanton 1987, vii).

When reading life stories, it is necessary to be aware that while they can embody characteristics of one genre, such as autobiography as defined in classical theories, they can also feature aspects of other genres. Neil Besner discusses this issue concerning Mavis Gallant’s “When We Were Nearly Young” and asks the following question:

Is this work a report, an essay masquerading as a story? Or is it a story masquerading as a reflection, a memoir? Could it be both? How to distinguish, on what ground? The presence or absence of documentary reference? The status of the narrator as reporter or story-teller? Which aspects of focus or style? (Besner as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 5-6)

A reader or a critic can locate in a narrative two features of an autobiography. Georges Gusdorf describes the first feature coined by Lejeune’s retrospective view as follows: “Autobiography… requires a man to take distance in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time” (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 4). The second characteristic, according to Gusdorf, will be the need of the writer to search and recognize whether his or her life “has been lived in vain and wasted,” dealing with the issue of “growing older” (as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 4, 8). But an autobiography could adhere to some kind of “disorientation” that will affect the traditional form of “finding a coherent and complete expression of a destiny” (Gusdorf as quoted in Somacarrera 2000, 8). Thus, an autobiography cannot be considered, in this case, as a complete account of a person’s life but a portion(s) of it.

## Complexity and Transgression in Genre Analysis

Vijay K. Bhatia argues that genre analysis is multidisciplinary and uses observations from different fields such as literature, linguistics, sociology, ethnomethodology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology (as quoted in Nielsen 1997, 207-208). Genre analysis aims “not to find out how genres are written but why they are written the way they are” (Nielsen 1997, 207–208).[[10]](#footnote-11) Bhatia favors John Swales’s definition of a genre because “Swales offers a good fusion of linguistic and sociological factors in his definition of a genre” (as quoted in Nielsen 1997, 208). Bhatia himself defines a genre as “primarily characterized by the communicative purpose(s) it is intended to fulfill” (as quoted in Nielsen 1997, 209). His genre analysis model offers analysis for unfamiliar genres, although the model can also be applied to any kind of genre, and, according to Martin Nielson (1997), this model is “process-orientated” (209). Nielsen suggests making a distinction between text external analysis and text internal analysis. The benefit of this model is that it emphasizes the significance of external text features to genre analysis. Nielsen claims that the steps “are not necessarily linear …The process and the description of it are linear or chronological. But … the profile of the genre itself, is not linear, but is interdependent, complex, multidisciplinary and hierarchical in its structure and nature.” (212).

The fact that this model for genre analysis gives a place for “communicative purposes,” stressing the “socially communicative status,” means that “socially recognized conventions rather than private intentions … are structuring a given text-genre” (Nielsen 1997, 214). In other words, the writer’s psychological and personal views are not the ones that determine the factors, although there might be some private intentions at work; still, it will nevertheless be within the socially recognized purpose(s) (214).

Regarding genre analysis, Swales and Bhatia observe it as “consistency of communicated purposes” (Bhatia 1996, 49). While this term can also provide “a more socio-critical look at what people do with language, or a theoretical issue or focus” (Bhatia 2002, 4). R. Miller (1984) and Carol Berkenkotter & Thomas N. Huckin (1995), define it as “*typification of social and rhetorical action*” (4). J.R. Martin (1993) describes it as “*regularities of staged, goal oriented social processes*”(4). What is essential for my research is the fact that although these genre analyses are motivated by linguistics interests, it does not matter what the research goal(s) is because “it cannot afford to undermine the complex and dynamic realities of the world of discourse” (5). Complexity, in this case, means that several texts can be incorporated from different kinds of genres that could have overlapped and resulted in conflicting communicative purposes (7). According to Bhatia, the main aims of genre theory should be:

To represent and account for the seemingly chaotic realities of the world; to understand and account for the private intentions of the author, in addition to socially recognized communicative purposes; to understand how language is used in and shaped by socio-critical environment; and, to offer effective solutions to pedagogical and other applied linguistic problems. (Bhatia 2002, 5)

Bhatia (1996) explains that while we identify genres by conventional features, we must consider that they continually develop: “Genres are dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurring situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning. Genres change over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs” (42). The genre form and content will be appropriate “to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time” (43).

Genres embody social-communicative aims, but they also serve to transfer personal motives. And while we do recognize separate generic devices, the reality is that they are often viewed as a hybrid, mixed and embedded structures. Different communities may have different views and interpretations of genres given names. J.R. Martin, Frances Christie, and Joan Rothery (1987) claim that genres can provide stability in cultures, but they can also assist authors in taking part in a social transformation (as quoted in Bhatia 1996, 44). They claim that genre is a social process. Gunther Kress argues, in this case, the following:

If genre is entirely imbricated in other social processes, it follows that unless we view society itself as static, then neither social structures, social processes, nor therefore genres are static. Genres are dynamic, responding to the dynamics of other parts of social systems. Hence genres change historically; hence new genres emerge over time, and hence, too, what appears as ‘the same’ generic form at one level has recognizably distinct forms in differing social groups. (Kress as quoted in Bhatia 1996, 45)

Bhatia noticed that writers often work within and across generic boundaries. They create new but related and/or hybrid forms of genres through which they will be able to express according to Bhatia (1995) and Fairclough (1995) their “‘private intentions’ within the socially accepted communicative practices and shared generic norms” (as quoted in Bhatia 2012, 24). Bhatia argues that a multidimensional and multi-perspective methodological framework is needed to understand and analyze genres as exhaustively as possible (Bhatia 2012, 26).

# The Novel in Life Writing

The conventional definition of a novel, defined by Steen and Biber, follows:

Its content would be fictional and portray a significant action or process. Its form could be one of suspense, surprise, or curiosity [….] Its type would be narrative [….] Its function would be to positively affect the mood of the reader. Its medium would be printed matter for a mass readership. Its domain would be the one of the arts. Its language could be characterized, with Biber (1989), as “extremely narrative, moderately involved, situated, nonabstract, and not marked for persuasion.” (Brackets in the original) (as quoted in Sinding 2010, 113)

But, since the emergence of life writing, it has become clear that the novel functions as a merger between genres that are usually distinguished. A memoir, which relies on autobiography, and a novel, which emphasizes matters of fiction, found a common place. There are several aspects that these genres share. Being a writer or a reader represents a mode of living and thinking that is asserted and affirmed by a fictional dialogue that occurs between them. A novel allows the reader to enter a “second life,” and although it is imaginary, it gives the impression of being real (Burdusel 2020, 27). A memoir requires its artist to be a powerful communicator who can “put things across” (27).

Writing a novel is about “a cathartic release of painful experience and unbearable emotion endorsed by the ability of the artist to act as a catalyst and to subsequently produce a work of art equally congenial and relevant to the reader” (Burdusel 2020, 27). It is self-contradictory to claim that the goal of fiction is “to tell the truth. Instead, it’s to tell beautiful, exact, well-constructed lies that enclose hard and shimmering truths,” or “you write fiction in order to tell the truth” (Barnes as quoted in Burdusel 2020, 27). According to Julian Barnes, “Fiction is the supreme fiction. And everybody’s autobiography is a fiction but not the supreme fiction” (as quoted in Burdusel 2020, 27). It is indeed confusing, especially when so far, we have dealt and treated fiction and life writing as two separate entities, testifying to the latter’s outstanding nature to be only about the truth (referring to the genre of autobiography for example). But “novels come out of life, not out of theories” (Barnes as quoted in Burdusel 2020, 27). In fact, memory plays a significant role in bringing fiction closer to autobiography. Memory is a subjective matter and can become an unreliable device to rely on as time passes. The level of authenticity of memory “sorts and shifts according to the demands made on it by the rememberer” (Burdusel 2020, 28). Thus, a piece of life writing can infuse autobiographical elements with a novel and emphasize reflective tones (28). The novel’s noticeable accomplishment “is its depth of the self-reflexive analysis of life” (28). The same can be said about the genre of autobiography. Ramkrishna Bhattacharya (2018) writes that “in many cases the first venture of a novelist has been, for all practical purposes, a thinly veiled autobiography, or reminiscences of their own” (1).

Robert Tracy (1986) writes that the autobiographer “uses the techniques of prose fiction” (275). The autobiographer forces a theme upon his life, and thus “applies the disciplines of imaginative literature rather than those of absolute historical veracity” (275–276). The writer can be the subject of his work, but he can also separate the subject from his life. Thus, the autobiographer follows the path of providing a narrative of “perfection of the life” (276). But such perfection to “transform the life” that was actually lived results in autobiographical fiction, “a novel with a protagonist whose adventures and development resemble the author’s, but are freed from dependence upon them” (276). Autobiographies “are fictional in form and to some extent perhaps in content; autobiographical fiction is partly based on fact” (276). What distinguishes fiction from autobiography, is that fiction “*tell*…they narrate a story, a series of events, more or less dramatic in nature,” while autobiographies “also tell, but they go further—they *explain*” (277). To choose fiction means to be free “to dramatize events, to make them stand out more boldly by freeing them from the tyranny of fact and chronology.” Autobiographies allow their writers to elaborate on the reasons why certain events happened to them, what they made of them, and how they understand these events in relation to the bigger pattern (279).

Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi argues that Victorian autobiographers tend “to exaggerate their own isolation in childhood” (as quoted in Tracy 1986, 282). Gelpi counts *David Copperfield* as an example, in which solitude is used as a literary device to focus the reader’s attention on the autobiographer’s single relationship with his father and on a single process, “his intellectual development” (Tracy 1986, 282). It can be implied that the autobiographer in such cases is self-centered (Tracy 1986, 282). According to Robert Tracy (1986), the autobiographer thinks that he or she is special, which is why they isolate themselves from their parents and family. An autobiographer seeks to write about his or her accomplished career, and this tendency seems to be magnified: “for both as persona and as autobiographer he is in a special sense his own creator, his own inventor and the determiner of his own personality” (283). We know what to expect from a novel, but “we can question the reality of the *persona*,” which is so convincingly presented in an autobiography. But knowing that the autobiographer can shape the life and personality, decisively, in order to expose a certain theme, shows how much “a novel satisfies, an autobiography disturbs” (288).

Georg Lukács recognized the form of biographical novel and shared his thoughts on this genre in *The Historical Novel:* “The effective historical novel pictures the social, political, economic, and intellectual forces that created the great collisions of a particular age. Since the biographical novel centers the narrative in the life story of a single heroic figure, it necessarily distorts and misrepresents the historical reality, because the ‘character is inevitably exaggerated, made to stand on tiptoe, his historical calling unduly emphasized while the real objective causes and factors of the historical mission are inevitably omitted’ ” (as quoted in Lackey 2016, 2). This inherent characteristic which the biographical novel is associated with change and misrepresent the historical and the political, which affects its irreparable status as an aesthetic form (Lackey 2016, 2). Virginia Woolf also supported this argument, making it clear in her work “The Art of Biography” that “such an aesthetic form could not work,” although according to Michael Lackey “her critique focuses less on history than on the impossibility of combining the actions distinctive to the creative writer and the traditional biographer” (3). But Lytton Strachey and the new biographies of the early twentieth century transformed these attitudes by applying creative imagination and fictional techniques when writing about a person’s life, allowing the artist/biographer the “freedom to invent,” turning the genre of biography into “a book that was not only a biography but also a work of art” (Woolf as quoted in Lackey 2016, 3). Woolf continued to argue that this is an impossible combination because “fact and fiction refused to mix” and claimed that “the novelist is free [to create],” but “the biographer is tied [to facts]” (as quoted in Lackey 2016, 3). For a work to be classified as a biographical novel, it should accurately represent the biographical subject; the name of the protagonist should be historical and factual and the novel should be established on the life of this figure. To provide a view of life and the world is not enough.

Postmodernism revolutionized how now we view the biographical novel because “it led general readers to give authors more creative license in their representation of historical figures” (Lackey 2016, 10). The criteria changed and novels were admired for their use of “rich, imaginative language in order to engage the reader and to represent the historical figure accurately” (11). According to Michael Lackey, “biographical novelists privilege symbolic representation over historical or biographical fact, because they think that a symbolic reality will give readers something more substantial about the nature of a historical period” (13). They differ from historians and biographers because they pursue to “create symbolic figures,” rather than “factual ‘reality’” (13). The focus in a biographical novel is on “the novelist’s vision of life and the world” and “not [on] an accurate representation of an actual person’s life” (20). It is not about providing the “right” representation of a subject’s life, but it is about using “the biographical subject in order to project their own vision of life and the world” (20). After 1999, postmodernism promoted the combinations of “fact and fiction, biography and the novel, or a historical figure and a fictional character . . .” And, the “postmodernists suggest that fact is fiction and that fiction is inseparable from fact.” The biographical novel has been appreciated for its “hybrid aesthetic form,” and the genre was officially recognized by 1999 (25).

This approach resulted in other hybrid forms as well. Postmodernists turned readers into skeptics, who questioned the accuracy of written history. According to Michael Cunningham there is nothing as “fact” because “we’re subjective, by nature” (as quoted in Lackey 2016, 30). Lackey in his work *The Rise and Legitimization of the American Biographical Novel* (2016) claims that the contemporary biographical novel is one of “the richest and most promising aesthetic innovations of the last fifty years,” but there is still a long way to go to establish this genre’s value and give it the appropriate framework for assessment (34).

# The History of Complexity Theory

Complexity theory is a new movement challenging conservative thinking. The theory is established upon “the tension between the *structure* of a system and the *pattern* created by the interaction of its components, and the tension between *determinism* and *unpredictability* in systems” (Sweeney 2002, 20).[[11]](#footnote-12) The question that this theory asks has to do with certainty. How sure can we be of how and where a system will change through time? (20). The term system in this case points to a perceived whole whose portions “interact richly because they continually affect each other and operate towards a common sense of purpose” (20).

References were found in the writings of early philosophers about “the relationship between the structure of matter and its pattern or form” (Sweeney 2002, 20). Thales and Parmenides asked in their study of substance the following questions: “What is reality made of?” and “What are the basic building blocks of matter?” (as quoted in Sweeney 2002, 20). The Greek philosophers were the ones to provide answers to these questions. They found earth, air, fire, and water to be the fundamental components of matter (21). This was the first evidence about how to perceive the essential components that constituted reality. This dialogue continues in the present day and can be traced to other disciplines as well, such as biology. However, the question remained the same: “what are the building blocks of matter and what is reality made of?” Over time, related research occurred into the study of form or pattern. Pythagoras in his work “stated distinction between structure or matter and pattern or form.” Aristotle as well found a difference between matter and form. He argued “that matter contained the essence of all things but only potentiality. Form or pattern was what gave this essence actuality.” The Greeks had the same problem, and they were trying to tackle the notion of determinism, particularly the question of whether the universe is ruled by deterministic laws? The next question was, can we foretell what will happen to systems accurately, and if yes, then how? The Greeks agreed at the time that the atoms, fall “through the void at the same speed and on parallel paths.” But this was an unsettling argument. If their paths are already determined, what does it say about human freedom? Epicurus solved this problem by suggesting a new concept called the “clinamen.” Lucretius explained the new concept in the following way: “While the first bodies are being carried downwards by their own weight in straight lines through the void, at times quite uncertain and at uncertain places, they deviate slightly from their course, just enough to have been defined as having changed direction” (21). Plato as well followed this direction and argued “in favor of the unchanging reality which was beyond becoming” (22).

During the seventeenth century, poets such as William Blake and Wordsworth opposed the Cartesian dualism, which implies the following according to *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

Mind-body dualism, in its original and most radical formulation, the philosophical view that mind and body (or matter) are fundamentally distinct kinds of substances or natures. That version, now often called substance dualism, implies that mind and body not only differ in meaning but refer to different kinds of entities.[[12]](#footnote-13)

In 1934, TS Eliott wrote about an element that complexity theorists[[13]](#footnote-14) call “an emergent property”[[14]](#footnote-15) in his poem *The Rock*:

Where is the life we have lost in loving?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

(as quoted in Sweeney 2002, 24)

Gradually other poets and philosophers took sides with Aristotle. Goethe was the first to introduce the term morphology. Goethe wrote that “each creature …is but a patterned gradation of one great harmonious whole” (as quoted in Sweeney 2002, 24). According to Kieran Sweeney (2002) “the understanding of organic form, of the pattern produced by the interaction of components, was an important feature of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant” (24). Kant differed between mechanisms and organisms. The first was reliant on “linear cause and effect links” (24). This kind of cooperativeness commanded in science and answered to both stability and change that was, without exception, predictable. Organisms, on the other hand, “were to be understood in a systematic way.” In this case, causality was basically developmental, “in that it was in the self-organising interaction of the parts, that those parts and subsequently the whole emerged” (24–25). Kant argued that science cannot provide answers to such systems, but it could complement some areas that needed further explanations. Complexity theory shows that even when we understand and recognize familiar events , and we anticipate their outputs, these inputs will possibly be followed by unpredictable outputs as well. Derrida once said: “If things were that simple … word would have gotten round” (as quoted in Sweeney 2002, 31).

Pattern and form exist also in the arts. The clash between structure and pattern, and “the tension being between determinism and unpredictability,” is not limited only to the natural sciences or to mathematics (Sweeney 2002, 29). Artists as well struggle with these notions. Examples can be found in Robert Delaunay's 1912 painting *Window on the City* (29, 31). The painting shows the use of “the multi-angle views of structures depicted in the two dimensions of the canvas.” Delaunay was also influenced “by the lyrical use of colour,” but he thought such paintings “particularly of the pointillists, lacked solidity and structure.” The use of geometrical shapes in the painting shows that Delaunay felt uneasy “with these two notions of pattern arising from colour, and structure delivered by geometrical form” (30). Another example from the arts is Scott Joplin’s *Elite Syncopations*, composed in 1902. A small phrase of music from this composition shows how “the structure of the music is delivered by the left hand’s constant steady rhythmic beat. The pattern of the semiquavers of the right hand, and their introduction in the offbeat of the note illustrates how Joplin was addressing the juxtaposition of structure (left hand) with pattern (delivered by the right hand)” (30).

In 2019, Marina Grishakova and Maria Poulaki published their edited book *Narrative Complexity: Cognition, Embodiment, Evolution*. In this book, the editors distinguish between formal, systematic, and processual complexity (Sommer 2020, 148). The papers included in this edition provide an interdisciplinary review of scientific, scholarly, and narrative poetics approaches to complexity (148). Grishakova and Poulaki argue that narratives should be considered as “a tool that may reveal, enhance, or suppress complexity by participating in agentic-systematic dynamics” (as quoted in Sommer 2020, 148). The first paper to be discussed in the book is by Marie-Laure Ryan titled “Narrative as/and Complex System/s.” Ryan focuses on what scientific complexity theorists would be aware of during their analysis using some key factors, which leads her to a systematic approach to viewing a narrative. Ryan speaks of systems and processes that are characterized by concepts like emergence, nonlinearity, or recursivity. She “defines emergence as a distinctive scalar property of narrative, i.e. its ability to produce multiple stories” (as quoted in Sommer 2020, 149).

Another paper discussed by David Ciccoricco and David Large focuses attention on the complexity of a hybrid app (produced by Los Angeles art and games studio Tender Claws) that uses “narrative strategies of the novel, film, and video games.” The app is called *Pry* and it invites users to “take on different roles, co-construct the story from fragments, or invite self-reflective reassessment of familiar touchscreen gestures.” These and other examples provide food for thought as they present the kind of processing that is required nowadays to understand the narrative experience (Sommer 2020, 149).

Mieke Bal in her work recognizes a new generic category, the “narrative of complexity” (as quoted in Sommer 2020, 152). She argues that such complexity “lies specifically in [the narrative’s] strategies of confusion.” (as quoted in Sommer 2020, 152). The last part of the book, “Narrative Complexity and Cultural Evolution” by Marina Grishakova, provides a new multidisciplinary perspective on narrative dynamics, one that “adopts a post-Darwinian perspective to promote a better understanding of narrative dynamics” (Sommer 2020, 154). Evolution, according to Grishakova, “involves both simplification and complexification cycles” (as quoted in Sommer 2020, 154).

## Complexity Theory Applied to Life Writing

The essay has been classified “as a type of literary discourse that is essentially formless and does not fit into any of the established genres—it has been called a genre which poses no restriction on content” (Winter 1996, 573).

Essays written in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe were conventional and strict on the one hand and aimed to express ideas that were simple and complex on the other. These new essays were supposed “to be spontaneous, tentative, open-ended, even unfinished, [but still] not the product of art or study” (Winter 1996, 574).

Montaigne’s essays were different in the sense that they reflected the essayist's confidence to take on more creativity and seek to experience with uncertainty. This new attitude slowly became “a precondition of essayistic thinking” (Winter 1996, 575). Essays of the eighteenth century were a fusion of dry knowledge, “abstractions of pure science” that used the vocabulary of the scholarship, but they also provided the essayist an opportunity to disseminate ideas and show original thinking, alterations, and additions to existing knowledge (575–576). During the first half of the eighteenth century “the author did not pretend to give all the information on an observed phenomenon—he respected its various layers and dimensions” (578). The enlightenment essayist as well saw “complex thought [as] containing an element of instability, while aspiring to multidimensionality” (578). There was hardly something “as perfect knowledge” (578).

Simplicity was now favored at the early stages of writing as “it encourages systematic and cohesive thinking” (H. L. Mencken as quoted in Winter 1996, 582), but there are times when other elements become more significant, such as depth (Winter 1996, 582). The essayist wants to provide a richer and much more accurate view of the reality that they are writing about. Thus, across time, the essay has become the only literary genre where simplicity and complexity play a part because the first is incomplete and useless without the other (584). Their relationship is what pulls the essayist in different directions, even at the same time (585). The perspective of the essayist is not to be predetermined but takes shape through the process of composition. The essay is a manifestation of “an attempt to create order out of randomness and chaos” (585).

Only recently has the chaos/complexity theory been applied to literary texts. Roghayeh Farsi in her work (2017) “Chaos/Complexity Theory and Postmodern Poetry: A Case Study of Jorie Graham’s “Fuse” examines how this theory can be applied and what new insights this methodology can bring for literary analysis. Farsi chose the poem by the US postmodern poet Graham as a case study. In the poem she searched for cases of order that will prevent its total dissolution. Sweeney (2002) writes that “complex and at times chaotic behaviour could give rise to order and beauty” (28). Farsi writes that “the poet’s rhetoric and linguistic experimentations are regarded as the strange attractors that disrupt the poem from within, the hold of the poem’s mythical subtext and the use of numbers to separate stanzas from one another are taken as attractors that bring back sort of order to ‘Fuse’ ” (1).[[15]](#footnote-16) Farsi’s conclusion is based on the findings that chaos/complexity theory is appropriate when analyzing fragmented texts for the reassessment of both chaos and order. Although it has been less than a decade since scientists have begun to credit this theory, it has been already established that the theory can provide many new perspectives. Farsi decided to apply this theory because it was not yet fully examined within the scope of literary interpretation. According to Farsi, this theory is best suited for postmodern texts simply because when “compared with traditional literary works, a postmodern text is complex, chaotic, and unstable and will remain so, no matter what methodology the reader deploys to impose sort of interpretation on it” (1). The proposed analysis is divided into two parts. The first examines “the chaotic world of ‘Fuse’ ” (1). In this case, Farsi analyzes the poem linguistically, rhetorically and personologically (1). The second step means to “loo[k] for order within the chaotic world of the text” (1). At this point, Farsi asks, whether she can find order in all aspects of the poem, or just in a few. Finding justifications or reasons for having order in the poem will help better understand the poem as a “whole” (1). Patrick Brady and Gordon E. Slethaug argue that “following chaos theory, complexity theory stresses self-organization of chaos into order” (as quoted in Farsi 2017, 2). Chaos theory is concerned with how chaos bursts into order. And complexity theory is concerned with how order irrupts into chaos. But complexity theory also deals with one more element according to John O. Kakonge: “Complex systems, with many different independent variables interacting with each other, can balance order and chaos” (as quoted in Farsi 2017, 2). Slethaug claims that “despite their tension, randomness, and pattern, chaos and order exist in co-dependency, and the artistic imagination activates, engages, and enhances them” (as quoted in Farsi 2017, 2). Farsi found the application of this methodology to be beneficial when the literary text requires a systematic way of analysis. She was able to search for strange attractors that interrupt and confuse the order of the poem’s system and then locate the order that attached the poem and which stops the poem “from total explosion into nothingness” (10). Through the application of this theory, Farsi was also able to focus on the “personological analysis of the speaker of the poem” (10). The instability that the poem created, the chaos, provided the reader with an opportunity to become a participant that can make their own interpretation of the text (10).

## The Total Novel in Complexity Theory

The novel needs to be realistic, “adhering to formal realism” (Perrson 2019, 2). With the sudden appearance of the novel, the term “fiction” was invented to renounce “the ultimate illusion of reality, i.e. of having taken place in ‘reality,’ which it is the business of a novel to create” (2). Irrelevant detail is added in the novel in order to reach “the whole truth” (2). The truth in the novel is shaped, redefined, revised (2). This can result in “novels [that] are very sloppily written, there are a lot of inconsistencies, needless repetitions, and glaring signs of forgetfulness” (3).

The autobiographical novel was established on the pillars of genres and sub-genres such as autobiography, confessions, diaries, epistles (including private letters), epistolary novels, mediations, and memoirs/reminiscences (Bhattacharya 2018, 3). There are three kinds of autobiographical novels: 1) autobiographical in form and content; 2) autobiographical in content but not in form; and 3) autobiographical in form but not in content (3). Novels can contain much text that is purely autobiographical, meaning that the element of autobiography can be found in it. However, the work will still belong to the genre of the novel and not autobiography. Bhattacharya in this case raises the following question: “where, then, exactly does the difference between a novel containing a bit or so of autobiographical element and a full-fledged autobiography lie?” (4). The answer is that an autobiographer is obliged to “stick to fact” only, while the novelist can imagine and invent (4). The autobiographer must “present a truthful account of what actually happened in his life, not what might or should have happened” (4). But then, can we trust that autobiographies provide the truth and nothing but the truth?

Bernard Shaw already claimed once that “autobiographies are lies” (as quoted in Bhattacharya 2018, 4–5). Such a perception “clashes … with that of Kate Hamburger (1957), who restricts the field of “make-believe … to the first-person novel, an indiscernible simulation of the authentic autobiographical story” (Genette, Ben-Ari, and McHale 1990, 757). But it is impossible to deny that an autobiography is written based on the author’s “selection and rejection” of information (Bhattacharya 2018, 5). The author selects what events of his life he or she includes in their autobiography. The author’s memory plays a significant role in this process. The novelist as well embarks on such a path, with one difference: “He can retain some events intact or can add to or alter them as he pleases … He is not obliged to stick to what actually happened” (5). Fiction is used as a tool to “suit the author’s requirements,” and this can also be traced in the ethnographic novel (5).

*American Indian Life* edited by Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons (1922), an anthology of short stories addressed to the lay readers, provides not only ethnographic facts but also the “psychological aspects of Indian culture” (as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 18–19). The contributors to this collection used the fictional approach to enhance “the accurate description of psychological behavior” (Langness and Frank 1978, 19). A.L. Kroeber (1922), an American cultural anthropologist writes in his introduction to this volume that:

The fictional form of presentation devised by the editor has definite merit. It allows a freedom in depicting or suggesting the thoughts and feelings of the Indian, such as is impossible in the formal, scientific report. In fact, it incites to active psychological treatment, else the tale would lag. At the same time the customs depicted are never invented. Each author has adhered strictly to the social facts as he knew them. He has merely selected those that seemed most characteristic and woven them into a plot around an imaginary Indian hero or heroine. The method is that of the historical novel, with the emphasis on the history rather than the romance. (Kroeber as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 19)

Franz Boas, an anthropologist, is among the twenty-five anthropologists listed as contributors to *American Indian Life*. If this work is representative of the state of anthropology during the 1920s, then it seems fiction was accepted “as a legitimate if not perfectly ordinary means of description” (Langness and Frank 1978, 19). Further, ethnography has been compared to the work of a novelist:

Today, every detail of custom is seen as part of a complex; it is recognized that details, considered in isolation, are as meaningless as isolated letters of the alphabet. So ethnography ceases to be an inventory of custom, it has become the art of thick description; the intricate interweaving of plot and counterplot as in the work of a major novelist. (Leach as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 18)

*Growing Up in New Guinea*, first published in 1930, was written by Mead “in a too novelistic vein” as well. Ethnographic fiction “has taken the form of the novel or short story.” The advantage of the novel to ethnography was that it had a “documentary sense” to it (Langness and Frank 1978, 19). Vito Laterza, from social anthropology (2007), argues that ethnography contains aspects of fiction:

Ethnographies are texts and as texts they are crafted in a particular style; style determines content at least as much as the experience of fieldwork does. It affects the reception of ethnographic data and theoretical conclusions. Ethnographies, therefore, should be read as specific forms of fiction. (Laterza 2007, 124)

But fiction can also be accepted as a form of ethnography. It can contain “detailed ethnographic descriptions and analytical statements about social realities” (Laterza 2007, 124). But, the conflicting nature of fiction and ethnography at first seems not to allow such an approach: “The first concerns the apparent contradiction between the fictional nature of the novel and the truth principle which is supposed to guide the work of the ethnographer.” The classic definitions of the novel describe it as a “work of the imagination of the author,” containing fictional aspects and described as “made up” or “imagined” (125). However, Crittenden (1991), Hempfer (2004), and Thomasson (1999) argue that this can be resolved because “fact and fiction blur into one another and there is no clear-cut divide between the two” (as quoted in Laterza 2007, 125). Any work of ethnography, a representation of the real world, will contain some level of fictionalization (Laterza 2007, 125). Critics would also argue that “novels … place a huge emphasis on characters,” and the author’s focus should be on providing “the relationship between individuals and society,” which is a complicated matter for ethnographers (126). But this issue is fixed when the ethnographer uses “dry objects of knowledge and abstract types” in the following way (131):

Research participants are rendered as humans, with emotions, contradictions, an active agency and a speaking self. Most importantly, the representation of research participant [is] as fully rounded characters, accompanied by the report of their personal narratives through direct speech and dialogue allows for the expression of multiple voices. (Laterza 2007, 131)

Thus, “character construction” allows the ethnographer-turned-novelist to elaborate and reveal a specific “view of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in the society under study” (Laterza 2007, 131). The ethnographic novel is defined as follows:

A “reflexive ethnography,” in that it is a “true story,” … and in that the author’s intentions is to make sense of the story’s ‘data’ in a theoretical fashion. … A wide variety of literary techniques are used (characters’ points of view, plot, stream of consciousness, dialogues), and the ‘academic’ and the ‘literary’ are blended into one seamless narrative (James, Salamone, and Ashforth as quoted in Laterza 2007, 126).

David Ako Odoi and Ernest Kwesi Klu’s work (2018) on “Ethnography within an Autobiographical Portrait: The Case of Camara Laye’s *The African Child*” argue that although Laye’s work is a novel, it also has aspects of autobiography and touches of ethnography (87). Therefore, the work “provides a bridge between these […] spheres” (87). Odoi and Klu define autobiography according to the critics who favor this genre as “a chronicle of the life of self who excavates his or her own past to discover what he was or often he believes he was” (87). But autobiography is not only about the self and his or her search for the self, as there are other thematic issues to be found within this genre beyond the self but still connected to it. This is revealed through the historical and cultural values of the society in which the self lives and in which they include their work of art. *The African Child,* for example, is a work that adopts history and general ethnography to portray believable characters, characters that are meaningful in the history of the Mandinka culture (87). In his work, Laye can allow a description of his growth and development as a Malinke child while adding another layer to his account to expose the socio-religious traditions of his culture and how these traditions shaped his personality (88). Fictive tools are used to make the narration rich (88). Ethnography is included for educational purposes to put forward Laye’s society (88). Thus*, The African Child* is “an autobiography written with novelistic tendencies” (90).

Carlos Eduardo Maldonado argues that “a strong link between complexity theory and literature is possible” (Maldonado 2021, 109). But few studies discuss the relationship between complexity and literature. Maldonado describes a total novel as a complex system. The total novel emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with the following characteristics:

Each total novel is a large and dense work (if taken by the number of pages, f.i.). It has a central thread that nonetheless bifurcates—literally, exactly in the sense of the bifurcations studied by Prigogine of Wolfram, for example. Numerous situations, characters, stories and timelines move along the central thread, complement it, diverge, are developed in parallel, and many times they do not have much to do with the central character of the novel, and yet help understand the whole story. (Maldonado 2021, 110)

There is also no theory yet of a “total novel.” Maldonado claims that “its characterization is a matter of taste, descriptions, and inner experience, very much like a phenomenological stance, an approach very much used in studying the sciences of complexity.” It is a “multi-layer story,” and each layer provides a different story; when taken all together, the layers “make up a whole that is never entirely achieved—for it is a living phenomenon. In one word, a total novel is a multi-scale system.” Furthermore, a total novel is not a linear story and is characterized “explicitly [by] a nonlinear set of a number of stories, each one overlapped on the others, each crossing other[s], having some bifurcations that lead nowhere (just like in life, in fact), some fully depicted while others are just sketched or barely suggested” (Maldonado 2021, 110). A total novel is defined as

The outcome of a subtle and well-made dynamic balance between fiction and essay, prose and poetry, logos and myth, imagination, and anthropology and history. It is neither more fiction nor sharp analysis of reality, and not more fantasy than research and documentation. Instead, a total novel is an intelligent and creative mixture of both components, the work of a thinker as well as of an artist. (Maldonado 2021, 110)

According to Maldonado, in a total novel, “the borderline between normality and fantasy (if not madness) is blurry, fuzzy, mobile.” It describes the thinking and writing style of authors: “The use of digressions, flashbacks, shifting time, and the displacement of space are some of the generic constitutive traits a total novel bears” (Maldonado 2021, 110).

Because of its nature, there is no wonder that a theory of a total novel must involve a complexity approach. There is no canon to a total novel because each total novel is rare and requires a theory of a “particular phenomenon”; it could not have a universal theory (Maldonado 2021, 110). In a total novel, the story is always complex; it can intertwine different genres, mixing them with no accurate borderline in between. Various situations, events, characters, and shifts take place that make the novel even more complex. Possibly, we will not understand the relationship of one event to the novel’s core. But the event, in this case, is self-governing and can involve the author’s observation on society, history, politics, etc. The author is revealed as a psychologist and the producer of fictional characters. And yet, the border between fiction and reality becomes absorptive as it repeatedly moves in the story.

Based on NetLogo, Maldonado provides on page 113 of his paper a simulation of the real perplexity of the many stories, situations, and characters that construct a whole. The origin of the development is not seen, but rather the final product of the entanglement is presented, and the reader is captured in it. A total novel allows gaps, for example, and these are reflected in the black spots that remain unsketched in the back of the screen. It is up to the reader to fill in these gaps, and for this reason, it can be suggested that literature provides the reader with some freedom that contradicts the constraints brought by science or philosophy.

The new language of complexity theory allows us to observe and interpret brand-new systems, phenomena, and behaviors that were not yet acknowledged or understood. An interdisciplinary way of thinking is essential when attempting to understand complexity. Total novels are complex.

Over the recent decade, there has been an increasing interest in applying complexity theory in development, health and social service policy, implementation, and evaluation (Walton 2014, 119). Mat Walton writes that “a complex system is comprised of multiple interacting actors, objects and processes defined as a system based on interest or function.” The interaction of components in such complex systems can call attention to new developments that cannot be recognized or examined through “individual system components.” The system must be analyzed and approached as a “whole.” Any change in interaction between components of the system will have an implication/ effect on the system as a “whole” (119).

This theory aids according to McDaniel & Driebe (2001) in “understanding the patterns of interaction between system elements at different levels and times, rather than analyzing individual elements in isolation” (as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 1). Using complexity theory, it is possible to apply several theoretical frameworks or concepts to observe and analyze a complex phenomenon in multiple ways (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 1). By selecting a theoretical perspective and a precise complexity approach, it will be possible to shape the research and the level of knowledge gained and described in a much more comprehensive manner. This theory focuses on the interaction of different elements leading to the emergence of new structures that may obscure what we perceive as usual within the conventional boundaries. Gear et al. (2017) and McDaniel et al. (2009) state that the complexity philosophy is comprised of “a myriad of continuously interacting elements in an open system—[which] allows an innovative methodological turn by blending diverse bodies of knowledge” (as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 7).

Tanya de Villiers and Paul Cilliers (2004) in their work “Narrating the Self: Freud, Dennett and Complexity Theory” argue “that the self can be characterized as a complex system” (34). The basis for this argument is Daniel Clement Dennett’s theory that claims that the “material self takes the form of a ‘narrative,’ where the creating and relating of the self is a fundamental human attribute, rooted in our evolutionary history” (35). This self, according to Dennett, “is a result of a human organism presenting its own actions and motivations to *itself* in terms of the intentional stance” (as quoted in Villiers and Cilliers 2004, 45). The self can be considered as “an *emergent property* of the interaction between the physiological processes of the brain and the environment (especially the cultural environment)” (Villiers and Cilliers 2004, 46). A complex system as well “is in continuous interaction with its environment —a relation that also needs to be accounted for” (46). These interactions are non-linear. Complex systems “have a memory, in that they are systems that evolve through time and that their histories shape them, and in so doing play a major role in their present structures and behaviours” (46). The same can be said about the self. The human mind of the self as well is regarded according to Dennett’s theory as a “continuum of ‘mind,’ ” continually evolving (44). Knowing that the self is complex means that “a complex approach to the narrative self” is needed to understand “its own characteristics, functions and motivations” (48). This new input makes it impossible to approach personal narratives through classical terms. Vulliers and Cilliers explain the problematic nature of such analysis:

Complex systems are dynamic and do not operate according to the dictates of a telos; changes are unpredictable, irregular, and contingent. Our material self develops and adapts in a specific structure, within a specific context, and does not possess a sort of Aristotelian formal cause or essence, other than the genetic predisposition to construct a self. … As the self learns, develops and adapts, changes are brought about both within the mental apparatus and upon the environment; changes which cause the self to adapt yet again. (Villiers and Cilliers 2004, 49–50)

# Women and Ethnography

James Clifford and George Marcus, both specialists in the field of anthropology, present a postmodernist critique stating that a work written by an anthropologist should be treated as ethnography. These ethnographies are “a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir, and the scientific report,” and as such should be viewed in poetic and political manners, suggesting that each anthropological work should be questioned and not taken as a given observation of a foreign culture (Gordon and Behar 1995, 3). This profound view, however, did not include women’s anthropological work as a premise of modern anthropology (4). According to Deborah A. Gordon and Ruth Behar, Clifford and Marcus knowingly decided to ignore women’s anthropological work, even though during the twentieth century, women did produce such work (4). In doing so, Clifford and Marcus’s book became controversial because it suggested that women’s anthropological work will never measure up to the criteria of men’s anthropological work (4-5).

In *Women Writing Culture*, Gordon and Behar criticize anthropology for being historically contradictory and defined it as a discipline that promotes ideas of diversity while going against it and not acknowledging women’s work (1995, 12). One of the most intriguing works by women, who could well be considered informants, are the works by “anthropological wives,” women denied academic recognition or acknowledged only within “their anthropologist husbands” work (Counihan 1996, 164). If these pioneers ever were recognized, they would open a vast area of anthropological studies to the public through their writing while directly using their minor role “to attain cross-cultural understanding” (164). Yet, the connection between anthropology and gender seemed to be complicated at the time. While anthropology promised devotion to the study of the “self in relation to an other,” a woman anthropologist was still considered the “other” in a field dominated by “patriarchy’s self” (Behar and Gordon 1995, 14). But there has been a development since the nineteenth century. The fact that women’s anthropological work had not been given a place within the discipline brought many theorists who do not work in the field to join forces, as they shared a “crisis in the politics of representation among women” (431). In addition, the exclusion of female anthropologists from their own discipline created a fraction in many areas, such as fieldwork, writing, and ethnography (431). Women anthropologists turned to “textual experimentation,” which allowed them to express more and to “write ‘first’ mixed genre ethnographies” that blend autobiography and ethnography (432). This, of course, must be explored, especially when this systematic approach to writing intersected women’s personal quest with their career quest; and the research involved produced a new kind of writing that is “more mobile and open to redefinition” (432).

## Margaret Mead

Margaret Mead (1901–1978) has become permanently linked in the public’s imagination with anthropology and with the study of sexuality (Lutkehaus 2008). Mead, a cross-cultural researcher who has been cited as one of the most prominent figures in the development of social sciences in the twentieth century, has been associated for a long time with her anthropological work in the South Pacific (Smith and Johnson 1997). Yet in her own time, her involvement in psychological research was under scrutiny because she took part in psychological studies rather than focusing on anthropology (Torrey as quoted in Smith and Johnson 1997). Not surprisingly, a quick search reveals that Mead obtained a Master of Psychology from Columbia University and attained psychology training (Smith and Johnson 1997). She was a member of the first generation of women in cultural anthropology. She was also a researcher who contributed to the field of developmental psychology; and some aspects of her work on childcare, adolescence, and mental retardation trickled into discussions in the medical community and are relevant even today (Money and Foerstal 1979). Her influence on the advancement of this science is unmeasurable.

Mead invested years of work studying how other non-Western cultures dealt with sexuality, reproduction, and childrearing. She observed and filmed women’s deliveries in New Guinea and Bali, where she conducted research and where women gave birth without any medical assistance or medication and in fragile settings (Martucci 2018). Mead’s direct, extraordinary experience led her to lay the groundwork for natural birthing practices and breastfeeding. She inspired the work of transcultural nursing care and had an immense impact on global health. Mead’s anthropological study of adolescence in Polynesian cultures resulted in the publication of *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. As a result of her psychological testing, Mead concluded that human experience and behaviors are not biologically determined but rather products of culture, and as such, a subject of change (Smith and Johnson 1997).

Mead also lectured at the National Institute of Mental Health during the Second World War, and her work there was published by the Institute. In her lectures, she advocated for a change in the treatment of people with disabilities. In 1959 Mead spoke before the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) regarding the importance of people with mental retardation (today called intellectual and developmental disability) participating in American culture (Smith and Johnson 1997). She based her insights on her Somoan research, where she witnessed people with “mental retardation” given an equal opportunity to participate in all cultural aspects. In her speech, she provided examples of how the inclusion of people with conditions such as Down syndrome could positively affect the well-being of people with challenges (Smith and Johnson 1997).

Mead played a crucial role in shaping our modern understanding of disability, and her public remarks made in 1953 on how the “American national character had to include all types of Americans” brought disability, for the first time, into the field of anthropology when studying human nature (as quoted in Reid-Cunningham 2009, 101). Only once did she author an article in a medical journal, namely the “Journal of Psychiatry Interpersonal and Biological Processes” in 1947, regarding psychosomatic theory and its failure to recognize the role of culture in the production of psychosomatic disease (Mead 1947). Mead’s autobiography *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years*, which was published in 1972, includes sections of ethnographic data and could be used as a vehicle for delivering facts on indigenous tribes (Pack 2011).

*Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* impacted society in multiple ways. The medical community made use of Mead’s stories on child development, adolescence, and disability, discussed in her autobiography, to study different aspects of these topics. Further, Mead’s studies influenced the lay public’s attitudes towards numerous issues. The public learned to accept the idea that common assumptions about human nature and the way it is approached should be questioned, and it is for this reason that Mead’s ideas depicted in her autobiography made their way into scientific debates.

### Mead’s Contribution to Health and Illness

Nancy E. Wilson and Daniel R. Wilson published their review on ethnopsychiatric studies in “Jefferson Journal of Psychiatry” in 1987. In their work, they reviewed how individuals experience a disorder and how culture deals with it and mainly shapes it. They include some statements from Mead’s preface published in *Patterns of Culture* in 1954. In the preface, Mead states that “no labels are suitable for all cultures” (as quoted in Wilson and Wilson 1987, 43). Wilson and Wilson claim this statement could be applied to categories of disorder as well. Sartorius et al. noticed that research methods that prove to be adequate in one cultural environment do not have to be used in another, and methodologies should be fitted to the diverse settings found in each culture (as quoted in Wilson and Wilson 1987, 43). Subsequently, new methods will provide perhaps other results that require specific training and approaches to practices suitable for each country. “Treatment response” to depression, for example, should be studied cross-culturally, and only then will it be possible to achieve “better diagnoses, care, and outcome of depressive disorders world-wide” (Wilson and Wilson, 1987, 51). Wilson and Wilson’s work presents an interest in anthropological psychiatry and its importance. Medical anthropology became an important factor in establishing better health care. Cultural interpretations and patterns can shape illness, detail the sick role, and influence illness behaviors (Wilson and Wilson 1987). Both anthropology and psychiatry fields share the same interest in terms of looking for “human universal truths” (Foults as quoted in Wilson and Wilson 1987, 41).

Lin Tsung-Yi contributed a chapter on mental health and the third world to the book *Mental Health, Cultural Values, and Social Development A Look into the 80’s* (1984). Tsung-Yi writes about Mead’s awareness of the East and developing countries and how she advocated for work to be done on mental health in all parts of the world. She characterizes Mead’s 1948 term “psychiatric imperialism” as a message of understanding that each theory and practice of psychiatry and psychotherapy should have a “cultural fit” (1984, 107).

John B. McKinlay, in a 1972 paper, uses Mead’s observations of childbirth in primitive cultures as an argument against the classification of childbirth as an illness, which became the norm in American culture during the 1970s. McKinlay writes about the intercultural and intracultural variation in the approach towards the way pregnancy is defined and treated. He writes how in some cultures, a pregnancy is considered a “normal” life phase that women at some point in their life undergo, while in other cultures, pregnancy is viewed as an illness that must be dealt with as quickly as possible (McKinlay 1972, 561). He suggests looking into the literature on intercultural variations in “Cultural Patterning of Perinatal Behavior,” published by Mead and Miles Newton in 1967 (571).

J. Frank Popplewell and Anees A. Sheikh, in their work, conclude from their review of the literature that most of the research concerning masculine development has a methodological deficiency. Most of the research done did not consider measurements other than parent-child relations, which can influence masculine development as well. Popplewell and Sheikh suggest that other factors will have to be considered in future research before any concrete claims are made. They base their argument on Mead’s 1939 study, where she describes the small role Samoan fathers played in their children’s lives and how children were mostly cared for by their relatives. While it should be expected from the research on masculine self-notion that such upbringing would result in raising a child who will acquire feminine traits and lack self-confidence, Mead’s report showed the contrary.

The same year, John A. Money and Lenore Foerstal published an article on childhood and adolescence. They focused on a recommendation by Mead that challenged the psychoanalytical opinion on child-rearing and what determines behavior as they become adults. Money writes about Mead’s research on Samoan adolescence (a study published by Mead in 1939) and how a child’s behavior as an adult is determined by the confinements put upon him or her by their culture (Mead 1939). Money and Foerstal’s work on Mead’s studies not only includes her greatest contribution on models of child-parent relationships to both worlds but also questions the elitist scientific community that did not use Mead’s knowledge (Money and Foerstal 1979). Ten years later an enormous scientific progress showed how much Mead studies were valid.

In 1989, Carolyn P. Edwards published her work on the influence of culture on child development. In her work, Edwards includes Mead’s terminology “knee babies” when explaining the term “toddlers” in the American usage (167). Her research methods include Mead’s terms: lap, knee, yard, and community ages of childhood. Edwards’s study concluded that there is no longer an infinite variety of characters for normal development, pointing out how different it could be to grow up in another society. In Edward’s case, Mead’s study was used as a tool to further the progress of understanding of early child development. Other studies from 2004 to 2018 were also influenced by Mead’s concepts on breastfeeding, childcare, child-rearing, and natural childbirth.

Barbara L. Philipp and Anne Merewood began their work on promoting “the baby-friendly way” for breastfeeding in 1997 at a Boston Medical Center (2004, 761). They used Mead’s slogan to “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has” as the basis for their teamwork (761). Philipp and Merewood wrote about their efforts to transform the traditional nursery setting based on previous research in other countries that demonstrated breastfeeding could decrease illness among newborns.

Clarke et al. published their work on caring and the impact of Madeleine Leininger’s culture care theory in 2009. Leininger sought insights into anthropology when establishing her theory in the 1960s. Her care theory and research with a transcultural focus made headlines in respective health fields (medicine, social work, physical theory, and occupational therapy) and is used by other health professionals (Clarke et al. 2009). But Leininger, a US nurse-anthropologist, was inspired by Mead’s work and ideas. She shaped and refined the scientific development of the concept of caring in nursing based on encouragement from Mead and her direct experience at the University of Cincinnati, where Mead lectured about the significance of a patient’s familial cultural background to medical residents and nurses (Clarke et al. 2009). Leininger worked on transcultural nursing care that would teach and educate nurses.

Ferda Aysan and Dennis Thompson (2009) published their work on professional child-rearing advice in the early twentieth century. They wrote about the early scientific pediatric race to supply parents with advice in cases when breastfeeding was not possible and when parents had to rely on other alternatives. They also provided a survey of the early contributions of developmental psychology, including efforts to develop scientific developmental psychology in the 1920s that would provide advice to parents. Major themes and insights presented to parents included Mead’s work “South Sea Hints on Bringing Up Children,” published in 1929 (Mead 1929).

Jessica Martucci published her work on medicine and society in 2018. She writes about Mead’s efforts to encourage natural birth and how her studies led her to personally experience a natural birth experience in 1939. Martucci writes that Mead’s studies and experience presented a new interest in childbirth, bringing a reform in maternal health care. Martucci claims that today, expecting mothers have other needs, and she presents a new way of treatment —the so-called “a good birth” (1171). Martucci writes that it is no longer the choice between medicalized and natural birth that matters today, but how women are treated through their birthing process.

### Mead’s Contribution to the Study of Adolescence

Anne-Sophie Cousteaux, Jean-Louis Pan Ké Shon, and Amy Jacobs published their work on gender and suicide in 2010. In it, they argue how individuals express their unwellness and how it depends on their gender. Assuming all individuals express themselves in the same way is false and can result in data misinterpretation. Their study focuses on the development of gender-specific indicators, and they include Mead’s research from 1935 on the intimate lives of three New Guinea tribes from infancy to adulthood as an argument for the significance of their study (Mead 1935). Mead observed gender-specific behaviors in the South Sea Islands and found individual unwellness to be associated with society’s expected behaviors from each gender. If it was a boy, was educated to hide fear, and if it was a girl, to show it (Cousteaux, Pan Ké Shon, and Jacobs 2010).

Paul B. Madden published his work on children and families living with diabetes. He utilized Mead’s concept of “village” to show that statistics no longer support her definition. In the twenty-first century, the majority of children in general are raised in single-parent households with no other adults residing in the home (Madden 2004, 19). And, young people with diabetes live in less stable environments (19). The lack of parental involvement due to various factors, such as work, makes it harder for today’s young people to receive the full support they need to overcome the difficulties of diabetes. This requires a social change in which the community puts efforts into building programs for young adults that include positive role models of adults with diabetes, recreation programs, education, and support for both the young adult and parent (19).

### Mead’s Contribution to the Study of Disability

J. David Smith and George Lee Jr. Johnson (1997) published their work on Mead and mental retardation in 1997 and concluded, based on Mead’s insights, that there is a need to aim for more accessibility for all individuals, which is essential for their sense of “wholeness” as citizens (Smith and Johnson 1997). Based on Mead’s research in Samoa, they ask to adapt the Samoan charitable actions towards vulnerable individuals in other societies as well.

Allison Ruby Reid-Cunningham (2009) published her work on anthropological theories of disability in 2009 and argues that anthropology provides the theoretical framework for the study of disability. She writes that people with disabilities were and still are stigmatized as “the other” and considered different from people without disabilities (100). Ethnography provides a helpful perspective for understanding disability (104, 106, 108). Reid-Cunningham writes that Mead spoke publicly in the 1950s about the inclusion of people with disabilities within the scope of “normal” Americans (101). Many types of disabilities can gain new insights from anthropological attention, such as mental illness and intellectual disability (108).

The use of anthropological terms to study disability within the scope of human behavior is still in progress. Child health, adolescence, and disability are among topics undergoing major dynamic redefinitions based on research of many disciplines. No doubt these topics of bio-psychosocial character are interrelated. Mead made her contribution to the modern formulation of evidence-based research for these domains, even though her arguments reached medical journals indirectly via articles written by others stressing her contribution. The latter fact could be explained by different factors related to her as a female anthropologist living and working in that historical period.

Maybe the history of anthropology, the development of its tools, and the way research works were published in this discipline were strange to the medical community or unaccepted by it. Multidisciplinary research and collaborations were not a prominent feature between medicine and anthropology of this historical period. Medical literature has its own history of ways to publish research and educate, and they stood rigid for centuries. Evidence had to be provided by defined standards and methodologies, and evidence in other disciplines relevant to medicine was criticized and researched using medical research methods. Mead’s life took place when medicine was dominated mainly by males and the biomedical model. The fact that Mead was a woman anthropologist, discussing the effect of cultural and psychosocial factors and the determinants of health, illness, disability, and child development marginalized her and led her to use the protocols established by her male counterparts to express her voice and describe her findings. The case of Mead’s contribution to medicine is an example of the uneasy way research evidence can move from one discipline to the other, regardless of its scientific relevance and strength (Morad, “Health and Illness,” 2020).

### The Relevance of Mead’s Concepts in Health and Illness to the Era of COVID-19

The contribution of the medical anthropologist to the study of COVID-19 is significant, especially when treating the pandemic as a syndemic. Merrill Singer, an American medical anthropologist, and his colleagues claim that a “syndemic approach reveals biological and social interactions that are important for prognosis, treatment, and health policy” (as quoted in Horton 2020, 874). Gilbert Lewis describes the medical anthropologist's role as a mediator between the individual (from a particular culture whose special patterns affect his or her illness behavior) and the physician. Illness behavior is not just a medical term; it is a social construct that is determined and shaped by cultural, social, economic, occupational, and medical factors. Anthropology, ethnography, and literature would crystallize health and illness behavior to the extent that medicine alone could not do.

Pathogens cause epidemics, and the latter shape cultures and cause people to develop strategies that limit contact with other groups. The ability to assess the threat, modulate a behavioral response, and make life changes differs from culture to culture. At the individual level, the layperson perceives illness differently from a physician, who has little opportunity to see patients in their homes or workplaces in order to assess some of the social forces that may have influenced and shaped the patient’s attitudes and responses to their illness (Lewis 1981, 151). Over time this has become the role of the medical anthropologist. As part of their education, medical anthropologists acquire skills to study a culture. They learn the language of the studied culture and follow its patterns of behavior and other more complicated events at a personal level, usually for longer periods (151). A physician will find the contribution of the medical anthropologist significant to their work with patients from cultural backgrounds different from their own. Within the field of anthropological studies of infectious diseases, medical anthropologists conventionally focused on social, political, and cultural aspects in the control of infectious disease outbreaks (Lynteris and Poleykett 2018, 434).

Richard Horton (2020) claims that a social aspect for preparedness control is needed to tackle COVID-19 (874). He argues that a syndemic approach towards the pandemic reveals biological and social interactions that are vital for prognosis, treatment, and health policy (874). The Lancet Commission revealed that the availability of inexpensive and practical interventions in the next few years could prevent almost five million deaths among the world’s poverty-stricken people (Horton 2020, 874). And that is without taking into account the reduced risks of dying from COVID-19 (874). The most important consequence of viewing COVID-19 as a syndemic is to emphasize its social origins. Approaching COVID-19 as a syndemic means more protection for vulnerable people by means other than medical, such as social distancing.

A meaningful, extensive, and past anthropological work enables medical anthropologists and other public health professionals to focus on differences that matter in the present. Previous discussions within the field prepared contemporary medical anthropology to look beyond the bounds of the traditional model of disease (Campbell 2011, 76). And yet, works by medical anthropologists are still missing in the literature.

A recent study from 2013 that focuses on the use of bamboo in the construction of Alexandre Yersin’s microbiological laboratory in plague-stricken Hong Kong is included in an article about aspects of epidemic control (Lynteris and Poleykett 2018, 434). Mead’s autobiography also includes a description of the use of bamboo as a building material. In her autobiography, Mead describes Bajoeng Gede as “a village in which most courtyard walls consisted of bamboo fencing, instead of the clay walls which, in other villages, shut each courtyard off from sight” (Mead [1972] 1995, 232). She writes how she later realized that the culture was worried about contamination issues. Another important detail that Mead noticed is that all the members of the population had hypothyroidism.

Quick access to recent studies that examine the benefits of Bamboo shows that Bamboo shoots used for construction are more effective in reducing nitrates contamination and removing atmospheric carbon than any other species (Sharma, Dhnwantri, and Mehta 2014, 250). Consuming bamboo shoots (BS) have also been used in naturopathy since ancient times as a cure to treat diseases, and its antithyroid potential has been examined and proved (Sarkar et al. 2020, 1, 6). Mead’s research is of tremendous value to the study of prevention and control of complex infections and should be given a place within the scientific discourse.

In part two of her autobiography, Mead discusses her fieldwork experience and the cultural differences that she observed among her close circle of life partners, colleagues, friends, neighbors, and family members who lived in different cultures. In the chapter “Samoa: The Adolescent Girl,” Mead writes how her friend, prior to her travel, equipped her with “a hundred little squares of torn old muslin ‘to wipe the children’s noses’ ” (Mead [1972] 1995, 146). This description emphasizes the need for a health system that will secure and supply essential products to remote communities. Enter COVID-19; without the necessary medical supplies, such as masks and cleaning products, the virus will continue to spread.

In the chapter “Return from the field,” Mead discusses her second husband, the New Zealand anthropologist Reo Fortune. Mead claims that Fortune did not seem bothered in any way by his lifestyle, which did not include the luxuries of modern culture such as watching a live symphony playing music (158). In the same chapter, however, Mead also discusses her meeting with Ruth Benedict, her colleague at the time, who told her how “deeply depressed” she was for spending her summer partly alone (163). These cases that Mead describes emphasize the importance of understanding cultural illness behavior when it comes to mental health. A cultural stigma can be a “barrier [when] recognizing personal mental illness and seeking help” (Schomerus et al. 2019, 469). A person’s stigmatizing attitudes reflect the population's attitudes and impact the decision to seek help (469–470). There is a stigma surrounding mental health issues, which was found to be especially high among Pacific peoples (Ataera-Minster and Trowland 2018, iii). Recent initiatives, such as “Like Minds, Like Mine,” a New Zealand project, was run to counter the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness (Vaughan and Hansen 2004, 113).

Mead’s description of her husband’s behavior presents the need for essential communication and strong leadership that will promote openness when it comes to mental health issues, an aspect that must be dealt with, especially during COVID-19 when isolation has become the new norm. The American Museum of Natural History with which Mead was associated made a list of subjects in which she was considered to be an expert. Mental health was among the topics listed. There are other occasions where Mead discusses issues like suicides and mental disturbances that result in self-isolation as a consequence of the disability and illness. Mead has not hesitated to voice her opinion on other types of epidemics in America like drug abuse. She has called on society not to stigmatize addicts but to see them as the “casualties of a badly organized society” (Mead as quoted in Quarles 2017). She calls for treatment and to support the police in coping with this epidemic.

In the chapter “Manus: The Thought of Primitive Children,” Mead describes the Manus women having “their necks and arms hung about with the hair and bones of the dead” (Mead [1972] 1995, 169). A portrait of starvation shows the extent that a global response is needed to help remote communities. The Manus people were also found to be a trading tribe —they exchanged market goods with the distant islands and among themselves. Such a description emphasizes the importance of helping this tribe to survive when it comes to businesses, such as offering financial assistance. Monetary aid can help communities facing the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to deal better with the unprecedented financial stress.

In the chapter “The Years between Field Trips,” Mead describes her fieldwork experience with Native Americans. Mead explains how adolescents were sent to schools for Indians, which educated children from different linguistic groups. The children were taught by federal employees who, according to Mead, “knew little, and usually cared less, about their pupils and the cultures from which they came” (Mead [1972] 1995, 191). Mead writes that this schooling resulted in the pupils returning to their reservation without acquiring proficiency in English and feeling more estranged from their traditional culture (191). Native Americans at the time often rejected the medical care offered to them, and it is possible, as Mead argues, that with the right “culture contact,” such as learning to value Native American culture, a positive change will happen (190-191). Cultural factors gain relevance especially during COVID-19. Everyone has a role to play in protecting themselves and others. Stigma and discrimination can happen when people link COVID-19 with a population, community, or nationality. A global response should address discrimination and inequality and provide resources that will reduce stigma.

In the chapter “Arapesh and Mundugumor: Sex Roles in Culture,” Mead describes the Mundugumor as “a fierce group of cannibals who occupied the best high ground along the riverbank. They preyed on their miserable swamp-dwelling neighbors and carried off their women to swell the households of the leading men” (Mead [1972] 1995, 204). Mead later explained that when the Australian administration took over, it decided to put the village leaders into prison. When the leaders were freed, they returned to their village and told their people that warfare and ceremonial life would no longer be part of their lives (204). All the young men had to leave and go to work. This is a case of strong leadership that did not destroy the village of the cannibals but instead used their leadership to make a change. Responding to COVID-19 as well means knowing how to handle a crisis as a leader. Strong leadership and community compliance are significant key elements that help to combat the pandemic. In this chapter, Mead also provides an interesting comparison of illness behavior between the Mundugumor people and Fortune. She writes how Fortune found the Mundugumor people to be fascinating because they treated illness the same way he did. Mead describes how Fortune treated disease in himself with physical activity (i.e., mount climbing), even with a high fever, to fight sickness out of his system (206).

According to Mead the Mundugumor “treat all illnesses and accidents, even among children as ‘matters for exasperation and anger’ ” (Mead as quoted in Jacoby ([1985] 2006, 63). In this culture, it is only the strongest who survive, those who can conquer the hard challenges of life (Jacoby [1985] 2006, 63). In this case, there is a need for strong leadership and a health system that will examine illness behavior in different cultures to prepare for future challenges, especially when unconventional treatments are utilized in a particular culture. As Mead states: “so I had ceased to expect any sympathy … I had a good deal of fever, and this, combined with Reo’s unrelenting attitude toward illness, and the general sense of frustration over the people, made it a very unpleasant three months” (Mead [1972] 1995, 207).

Mead’s chapter “Tchambuli: Sex and Temperament” describes the Washkuk houses, scattered far apart along steep roads (Mead [1972] 1995, 211). Mead had to walk a mile to find a house with a man, a woman, a child, and two dogs (211). This community was not largely populated. Mead’s insight into this culture’s housing conditions emphasizes the importance of making efforts to reach all communities, even those not compactly built and close together, in terms of medical care and supplies (227).

Mead writes about her meeting with Australian explorers, adventurers, and civil servants in New Guinea in the chapter “Bali and Iatmul: A Quantum Leap.” She describes how she did not bother to discuss her research with them because they thought that “the peoples of New Guinea were very alien and strange—souls to be saved,” and who cannot be taught (Mead [1972] 1995, 226). Mead explains that in the view of these Australians, the Papua New Guineans need “to be controlled, governed, and slightly civilized” (226). This discriminative attitude towards the peoples of New Guinea as described in Mead’s autobiography underlines the lack of awareness and the crucial need for a global and a local response that will take on the initiative to teach about aboriginal people.

In the same chapter, Mead writes how on the Sepik, “the mosquitoes and the heat provid[ed] a constant irritation of bites, cuts, itches, and small vexatious infections that might turn into tropical ulcers. There was no skilled help, no way of getting anything done that one did not initiate and take responsibility for oneself” (Mead [1972] 1995, 226). And there was no treatment for malaria (227). This point underlines the significant contribution that global collaboration can have in providing medical care to remote areas.

Mead’s contribution is evident in the media as well. The most recent study up to date that includes a debate on Mead and COVID-19 discusses the story of Thomas McDade, a biological anthropologist (King 2020). During the pandemic, McDade came up with the idea of using an older method that he had practiced for over two decades in the field, only this time to detect COVID-19. McDade used the minimally invasive method “dried blood spot” (DBS) to gather blood samples in the field without having study participants attend a lab or a clinic.

The fascinating part of McDade’s journey to biological anthropology and specifically to DBS lies within his inspiration: Margaret Mead. Her book *Coming of Age in Samo*a, originally published in 1928 (this research was also discussed in her autobiography) raised curiosity in the young McDade, who became interested during his grad school studies of stress and its relation to the human immune system among adolescents in Samoa. Following in Mead’s footsteps, he traveled to Samoa and used the DBS technique to collect data for his study analysis. Mead’s work is mentioned as the engine power that led to scientific interest in remote communities and consequently to the utilization of technology that allows the examination of different diseases and conditions in distant populations—becoming one of the most popular off-the-shelf techniques used during this pandemic.

Mead’s work is also used in a study that focuses on raising awareness of the side effects of isolation and loneliness among the elderly and children during the COVID-19 pandemic. In their column, Lucy Rinaldi and Cheryl McFadden (2020) provide various alternatives to support the struggling members of the community, especially in the absence of face-to-face interaction. They also discuss the importance of developing relationships despite age differences among children, adolescents, and seniors. Relying on Mead’s research, the authors show (through different programs) that treating mental illness is within the nation’s capabilities and its endeavors to act and care for its members.

Belleruth Naparstek writes about the connection of loneliness to the high rate of heart disease, depression, cognitive decline, and early death. In this case, the author uses Mead’s example of the first sign of civilization as an indication of why compassion towards each other during pandemics plays an important role in reducing the risk for the above-mentioned diseases. Naparstek writes that Mead considered a 15,000-year-old fractured thighbone, which had broken and later healed, as the first sign of civilization. Such an injury takes six weeks to heal, during which the wounded must rely on their community for survival. Offering support and care in addition to medical aid is the key to healing. According to Mead’s research, this was as much the case for our ancestors as it is for us today, and being alert towards the members of our community can save lives.

### Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach of Literature and Science

Warwick H. Anderson cites Mead’s call for medical assistance in the case of an outbreak to assist suffering indigenous people, but it is not enough to establish a medical policy that relies only on traditional medicine (Anderson 2008, 3676; Bhasin 2007, 1). In some countries, state health programs do not include necessary anthropological consultations (Bhasin 2007, 1). Auto/ethnographies that include insights on health and illness can play a part and should be considered to further rescue and revalue cultures that contribute to human health and to develop indigenous medical knowledge and its systems (1).

Shirley Lindenbaum’s (2008) research on the case of the kuru epidemic of the Fore people from Papua New Guinea concluded that “anthropologists and medical investigators did not bring an end to the epidemic” (3720). Rather, it was the scientific perceptiveness of the transmission of kuru, which resulted from the joint efforts of anthropology and medicine (3720). Lindenbaum, in her review, defines anthropology as “a natural science and a humanistic discipline, mediating between human biology and ecology on the one hand and the study of human understanding on the other” (3715). Her description of the kuru disease is a great example of how anthropology and medicine can contribute to our understanding of illness behavior. Regarding our global epidemic, many details of its origin remain unclear, but anthropology could offer some explanations for its occurrence.

Mead was trained to be an expert in interpretation. Her love for detail and context offers us more than just a description of the culture. It gives a multidimensional picture of emotional and relational components with a halo of wholeness. That is the case when she writes about illness behavior, disability, and mental health, taking in consideration developmental issues and reflecting scientifically on its origins and causations.

Mead’s words reflect many voices of both healthy and ill people, children and elderly, men and women, seeking sympathy and expressing sorrow. Today we face a global pandemic while telecommunication is broadcasting remote voices of fearful people. We share the feelings of loss of control and certainty. At the same time, we try to bring this saga to its resolution. The question is whether modern medicine can contain this crisis or take inspiration from Mead and other anthropological pioneers to tailor solutions that fit each culture differently.

So, what is the recourse? We have a pandemic, and no laboratory can explain all the whys and how’s—why, what, where, when, who, and how. Medicine could learn from ethnographic studies and qualitative research that add more insight into containing the infection and offer more local solutions suitable for each society, culture, geographic region, health system, and more (Geertz [1973] 2003; Ponterotto 2006).

### The Role of the Writer

The literature can provide clarity on some of the cultures that Mead studied and framed in her research when attempting to respond to COVID-19 and combat the challenges that face humanity during this pandemic. It is worth turning to Mead’s work to better understand the needs of each culture and how they cope with illness. In order to respond globally to the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to address many cultures, societies, and individual interpretations of this experience. And since we have no answers for the diverse questions that humanity raises, we need to find versatile answers that can be comprehended by all individuals. Health professionals assisted by ethnographers can contribute more to the understanding of the epidemic and would offer humanity adjustable approaches to contain the pandemic. A partnership of ethnography and anthropology can make the approximation of scientific answers more acceptable and understandable. Literature and science would be enriched by more ethnographic and autobiographical studies because from them, we learn the varied ways people behave during epidemics. Cultures preserve their memories of these periods and canonize their experiences and behaviors to be used in a time of need, which this is. Since we know today that individual behavior and social interactions affect the magnitude and control of an epidemic, we also know that remote cultures have a fresher collective memory of epidemics that could be adapted and adopted partially or to a larger extent to deal effectively with our global pandemic. Even in Western culture, most of the descriptions and knowledge of epidemics are not found in medical writings and textbooks but in other forms of literature. Literature throughout the centuries constitutes a canon of collective and individual experiences even from catastrophic times that could be of value for people today (Morad, “Health,” 2020).

# Methods

## Theoretical Framework

### Chaos Theory

In the early 1980s, with the assistance of computer-generated simulations, scientists identified deterministic chaos, a feature that has invented a new criterion in the scientific framework (Parker 2007, 1). According to the *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, chaos theory and complexity theory are defined as follows:

Chaos theory and complexity theory … provide a mathematical framework for thinking about change over time. Chaos theory seeks an understanding of simple systems that may change in a sudden, unexpected, or irregular way. Complexity theory focuses on complex systems involving numerous interacting parts, which often give rise to unexpected order. The framework that encompasses both theories is one of nonlinear interactions between variables that give rise to outcomes that are not easily predictable.[[16]](#footnote-17)

According to Jo Alyson Parker (2007) “Chaos theory enables us to see the physical world in new ways and to look anew at texts that … [are] ‘chaotic’ ” (2). By applying a chaos-theory lens on chaotic literary texts “we can link narrative structure with narrative content and link the formalism of traditional narratology with the reader’s production of narrative meaning” (2). N. Katherine Hayles, a literary scholar who did pioneering work on chaos theory found that what was “once seen as aberrant, the nonlinear and the random are now understood as prevalent, the physical behaviors once disregarded and dismissed are now considered legitimate areas of inquiry” (as quoted in Parker 2007, 2). The most extensive “insights that chaos theory offers us are that patterns of order emerge spontaneously out of random behavior, that deterministic systems can generate random behavior when small uncertainties are amplified as the system develops through time, and that time itself can operate differently at local levels” (Parker 2007, 2). Parker writes that if we view a literary text through chaos-theory lens, we can also better understand narratives whose structures exhibit chaotic traits: “Such a reading enables us to apprehend how their form is their meaning, which emerges from the particular social, cultural, and historical circumstances, and how their meaning is dynamical, entangling the reader in the interpretive process” (2–3). Through the granted perspective that chaos theory entails, we can detect the “disorderly order—the complex yet simple elegance—of these narratives” (3).

George A. Reisch (1991) writes that “if the state of a system typically turns out to be very sensitive to its earlier states—one of which could be called the system’s “initial condition”—then the system is chaotic” (4). A non-chaotic system will not be affected so much by small changes in initial conditions. Such small differences in initial conditions will produce only small differences in the final states (5). But in chaotic systems, “small initial differences typically give way to very great differences among final states” (5). This feature is also what classifies them as chaotic. What is interesting about chaos theory is its “generality,” which can be applied to anything—our lives, histories, and experiences (6). Core concepts of the chaos theory, such as the butterfly effect, can be adapted to explore new ways of looking at Mead’s ethnographic autobiography.

### Complexity Theory

Complexity theory takes chaos theory a step further because it “explains in more detail how an organization or network of elements adapts to an unstable environment” (Jones and Ells 2011, 628).

Complexity theory used in science and literature has gained popularity in research and offers explanations and understanding of complex systems (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018). It aids to understand the generation, interpretation, and manipulation of knowledge (Cheek 2000; Thompson et al. as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 1). According to Michelle E. Jordn et al., this knowledge is under the influence of dynamics that could be captured by the selection and articulation of theoretical perspectives, methodologies, frameworks, models, methods, and outcomes (Jordon et al. 2010; C. M. Martin and Felix-Bortolotti as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 1). I am aware of studies using complexity theory in health care research, social science, and recently in literature, to explain the complexity of a system that is under study. Complexity theory focuses on patterns of interactions between system elements while looking at different levels and times without analyzing the individual isolated elements. It has numerous concepts that are applied alongside frameworks to view the phenomena in many ways (Eppel, 2017; Tenbensel as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 2). It enables a transdisciplinary approach to blend diverse corpora of knowledge and by this enriches the understanding of complex phenomena (Gear et al. 2017; C. M. Martin and Felix-Bortolotti as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 2). The theory offers more than eighteen complexity concepts, “including self-organization, emergence, nonlinearity, feedback, loops, and path dependency” (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 2). Researchers use qualitative research to understand complex dynamics that might otherwise be missed by exploration. Thompson et al. have used case studies to study complexity and with other scholars demonstrated the transdisciplinary potential of complexity theory (Thompson et al. 2016, as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 2). Complexity theory could be helpful while applied to parts of the research design. However, Claire Gear, Elizabeth Eppel, and Jane Koziol-Mclain (2018) utilized the theory as a research methodology to inform full research design. The used perspective shapes the design and the scope of knowledge that must be explored (Patton as quoted in Gear, Eppel and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3). The perspective presents “naturally [the] boundaries to alternative ways of knowing” (Clark 2013; Paterson et al. as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3).

A complexity theoretical perspective draws attention to the interactions and the emergence of new relationship structures (McDaniel and Driebe, 2001; McDaniel et al. 2013; Thompson et al. as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3). Here we deal with a post-structural paradigm focusing on the interaction and its effect on how knowledge is constructed between the concept and the language (Cheek 2000; Cilliers 1998; Morcol as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3). This research approach allows for interactions between explored and unexplored elements to be revealed and carried out while their nature is continuously shifting. This is right for complex, social, cultural, scientific, and literary systems that offer us uncertainty, surprise, and versatile possibilities of system behavior (Begun and Kaissi as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3). This perspective points to the fact that the future is always uncertain and could offer many outcomes (Begun and Kaissi 2010; Cheek 2000; Cilliers as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 3).

My research approach would be pragmatic while looking at the different concepts used in the first part as a whole, with many interactions to be explored. These interactions are so complex in nature that their behavior is a complex system with great dynamic patterns and self-organizing properties, which leads to the emergence of dominant discourses. In this case, the discourse is not static, but it emerges from the dynamic patterns of interactions between multiple agents. “Agent” is a system element or part of it, corresponding to other agent actions and information (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 2). Its responses include learning and adaptation, and elements could be single, collective, or in process (2). “Self-organization” is the “spontaneous emergence of new relationships, forms or patterns of behavior” that arise from repeated agent interactions over time (2). According to the theory, new system properties or levels of a complex organization by agent self-organization are called “emergence” (2). In addition, boundaries are defined as an “artificial frame or socially constructed reference point” connecting or separating a system from its environment, and when the system is fluid it is difficult to draw the boundaries objectively (2). Chaos and order are other major concepts used in this theory, alongside loops, perspective, and the concept of the total novel.

I will look at Mead’s autobiography and search for the many elements that I found relevant during my literature review. My main focus will be the study of interactions between the different systems and elements found in her work. The autobiography shows that an aspect of reality at a particular point in time provides “a static illustration of discourses in play” (Cheek 2000; Repley as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 5). Instead of concentrating on the content alone, I focus on the functions of the work, namely, what the document does more than what it says (Prior as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 5). For me, the document position and manipulation by agents across different parts of the system is significant (Prior as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 5), which is why I utilized numerous volumes of secondary material in my evaluation of the autobiography. The study of secondary materials aids in analysis by placing a timeline and context around the selected document, and the result will be several new perspectives on Mead’s autobiography. In addition, I will show the purpose of the document and how it is used and integrated with various kinds of knowledge networks. I reveal the voices heard from within the document and the broader discourse on which this document sits.

In her autobiography, Mead offers many interviews with study participants, and these figures may present new perspectives on the complexity rooted in her work. Interviews are analyzed to show the interaction of the system agents, and the diversity of participants offers responses reflective of different agents and micro and macro diversities (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 6). Analyzing the interviews allows for responses to go beyond boundaries to elicit more complexity in the areas of political issues, social problems, cultures and clashes between cultures, gender, identity, education, and more (6). Looking at these interviews from the complexity theory point of view is different than narrative interviewing and offers better identification of local contextual factors and calls attention to the interaction generating self-organization (Lanham et al. as quoted in Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 6). I will also be challenging preconceived ideas about the research problem shown by others to be critical in working with complex systems that are evolving constantly (Gear, Eppel, and Koziol-Mclain 2018, 6).

One way to study cases by adapting complexity theory is to use the “complex case study” approach described in Lindsay Hetherington’s article “Complexity Thinking and Methodology: The Potential of ‘Complex Case Study’ for Educational Research.” According to Robert E. Stake:

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case … We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (Stake as quoted in Hetherington 2013, 75)

Complexity thinking approach to a case study “enables the researcher to maintain a sensitivity to the open-ended and emergent within a case while at the same time acknowledging that in schools, and in research, processes of complexity reduction are ongoing” (Hetherington 2013, 82). According to Hetherington, this research approach “can be viewed as distinct from, though similar to, other case study approaches, drawing out particular distinctions in relation to key debates about causality and prediction, setting the boundaries of the case, and the positioning of the researcher in relation to the case” (83).[[17]](#footnote-18) Examining a case study:

Through a complexity lens … means paying attention to ways in which complexity is both reduced and produced in a system. . . . In terms of methodological decision-making, this argument suggests that whilst it is necessary to reduce complexity in order to conduct research, the decisions taken in doing so also produce complexity in different ways. The researcher is part of the research in this framing of complexity and cannot be an external observer; the role of the researcher is to interact with a real, complex world and therefore have a role in making the world through their interactions. (Hetherington 2013, 81–82)

Such a research approach:

Attempts to cohere the research around a particular topic without closing down the “goals” of the research (as complex systems are open-ended); which is focused on particular levels of emergence that are of interest and explored through particular techniques deemed appropriate for those interests and levels; in which the researcher is a part; and in which the research remains open to unanticipated paths which may emerge in the course of the research.” (Hetherington 2013, 83)

### The Edge of Chaos

The proposed model is based on the edge of chaos, a term that was established in the mid-1970s. The development of complex system theory led to the search for a unified conceptual framework. Ludwig Bertalanffy defines the system as “a complex of components in mutual interaction” (as quoted in Hudson 2000, 216). According to Ali Cambel, chaos theory itself assembles concepts that can “deal with complex systems characterized by periodic, non-linear, dynamic, and transitional elements” (as quoted in Hudson 2000, 219). The term “chaos” in this case “refers to systems which can be found at an intermediate point on the continuum which ranges from the completely periodic and predictable to the totally random, and it refers to systems in which there is a type of order which never exactly replicates itself” (Hudson 2000, 219).

In her book *Chaos Bound,* N. Katherine Haylesprovides an example for a chaotic system: “Bowling is a difficult sport because a ball thrown in nearly identical ways can nevertheless follow very different paths. One time it may curve just right for a strike and another time veer off into the gutter, even though it was thrown almost the same both times. This extreme sensitivity to initial conditions is characteristic of chaotic systems” (Hayles 1990, 14).

Without ascribing the conditions with “*infinite precision*,” a chaotic system will become unpredictable (14). Thus, a chaotic system can merge predetermined conditions and unpredictability (14). In Hayles words, this has opened a space between order and disorder (15). The “edge of chaos,” according to Norman Packard, “is regarded by many as a state in complex adaptive systems that is maximally conducive to creativity and problem solving” (Packard as quoted in Hudson 2000, 219). Roger Lewin defines the edge of chaos as “where information gets its foot in the door in the physical world, where it gets the upper hand over energy…. Being at the transition point between order and chaos not only buys you exquisite control—small input/big change—but it also buys you the possibility that information processing can become an important part of the dynamics of the system” (Lewin as quoted in Hudson 2000, 224).

Psychologist Ruth Richards claims that the edge of chaos is a state in which creativity can be produced, since “chaotic processes never repeat themselves, [and because of this] they represent an endless source of novelty” (as quoted in Hudson 2000, 224). Thus, creativity emerges at the point of balance between regular and chaotic forms. According to Hayles, “creative writing is located within complex fields of intertextual resonances that affect signification not only in the narrow sense of the way words are understood but also in the broader sense of the way plots are structured, characters conceived, actions represented” (1990, 19).

The following key concepts of chaos and complexity theory will be utilized when analyzing Mead’s ethnographic autobiography.

*Self-Organization****:***It is a key concept within the complexity theory used to refer to the emergence of patterns at the lower levels. It has potential and relevance in studying social dynamics and is less used out of the boundaries of complexity science (Anzola, Barbrook-Johnson, and Cano 2017, 221). David Anzola, Peter Barbrook-Johnson, and Juan I. Cano in their systematic review identify literature from social science that could inform research in the use of self-organization out of complexity science (221). The use of the self-organization concept enables us to understand and explore the connection between individual action and the result at the population level since it can go unknown or misrepresented in theory and research. A self-organizing system has variables and relations that vary in time, and therefore its analysis could be performed by considering the variability instead of focusing on the individual states (225).

It is possible in the case of social sciences, psychology, theology, and even the study of literature to address both parts of self-organization. First, the organization concept, and second, a focus on the self, such as self-realization, self-determination, or self-constitution referring to the agency of the individual (Anzola, Barbrook-Johnson, and Cano 2017, 229). In the mentioned review, there is another perspective: looking at organizations as embedded in the context, even when boundaries are not well defined and there are plenty of flows of interaction between the environment and the organization (231). Order, equilibrium, and contract are discussed as examples of ambivalent uses of self-organization (223). In my analysis, I focus on these three due to deficiencies in the use of this concept in literature. As with equilibrium, the notion of social contract also stresses the issue of individual decision-making (238). Also, like contract, emergence “is an enquiry about whether patterns which are usually described as structures or institutions can emerge from a state of non-sociality” (238). The dynamics of emergence and self-organization “depend on initial conditions and particular properties of the interacting entities” (238). Because of the rationality and reflexivity of people, we can see “more diversity in the resulting patterns” (238).

*Emergence****:***Omer Yezdani, Louis Sanzogni, and Arthur Poropat claim that “complexity theory applies an understanding of leadership and organisation less as an art of prediction, and more of one of sense-making, cultivated participation, interaction and influence between individuals across all levels of the organisation where leadership itself is viewed as an emergent event” (Lichtenstein et al. as quoted in Yezdani, Sanzogni, and Poropat 2015, 305). Emergence as a concept “refers to novel and coherent forms (structure, pattern, order) arising from the dynamic interplay among elements at successive layers within a complex adaptive system” (Goldstein 1999; Chiles et al. as quoted in Yezdani, Sanzogni, and Poropat 2015, 306). System is to be considered adaptive if it possesses the capacity for emergent order (Anderson as quoted in Yezdani, Sanzogni, and Poropat 2015, 306). The emergence of self-organizing structure and strategy “occurs both with and without managerial control, within and beyond the boundaries of the organization” (Mintzberg 1994; Plowman and Duchon as quoted in Yezdani, Sanzogni, and Poropat 2015, 306). When we understand emergence as a product of human interaction we should “observe and measure the nature, dynamics and increments of interpersonal influence and their consequent links to system-level behaviours (Hazy 2008; Lichtenstein and Plowman as quoted in Yezdani, Sanzogni, and Poropat 2015, 306). When analyzing Mead’s autobiography, I will address several issues related to her leadership as it influences her writing and is reflected in her autobiography.

*Attractors****:*** According to Shimon L. Dolan, Salvador Garcia, Samantha Diegoli, and Alan Auerbach (2000), organizational values could be considered attractors of chaos. They discuss the emerging cultural change; and, in my research, while looking at *Blackberry Winter*, I will observe the role of these attractors from the perspective of complexity theory. A strange attractor is “a phenomenon that absorbs or catches the system’s final status of order” (4). Its importance lies in the fact that chaos can be determined in certain aspects, and this is possible because a strange attractor has two behavioral patterns: it defines the system behavior and is considered to be of limited function. But the strange attractor is chaotic since the behavior of the system is unforeseeable, and we cannot “know where the system limit is moving through at each moment” (4).

*Interaction****:*** Complexity science is not only about “understanding the parts that contribute to the whole but [also about] … understanding how each part interacts with all the other parts and emerges into a new entity, thus having a more comprehensive and complete understanding of the whole” (Turner and Baker 2019, 2). T.-W Wang writes that “by identifying boundaries between systems and their environment, researchers are better able to study interactions between the systems and their environment” (as quoted in Turner and Baker 2019, 3). In complexity theory these interactions are the ones that push “a system toward new emerging states as it coevolves within its environment” (Strathern and McGlade as quoted in Turner and Baker 2019, 9). In a rules-based approach, rules play a significant role “in the emergence of mechanistic systems that are not typically self-organizing but result from random mutations. The prediction of these rules-based systems come from the form of the rules of schemas,” and a minimal change in interactions in such a system can result in a large effect/s (Antonacopoulou and Chiva 2007; Burgelman and Grove as quoted in Turner and Baker 2019, 13). In connectionist approach, the system’s outcomes cannot be predicted, meaning the connections and interactions among the individual agents (e.g., individuals, teams, functions, departments, and organizations) results in emergence that cannot be predicted “based on traditional correlation and cause-and-effect statements or from predefined rules” (Antonacopoulou and Chiva as quoted in Turner and Baker 2019, 13). Because of the complexity of the system, when too many actors take a role, the number of units and relationships grow.

Such a complexity we cannot master. But, according to Cecile Gerwel Proches and Shamim Bodhanya, these “processes can be understood and managed through the interactions that take place among the agents involved” (as quoted in Turner and Baker 2019, 13). Piotr Sadowski in his work “Literature as Interaction: A Systems Model of Literary Composition and Reception” writes,

In an integrative model postulated by systems science the literary process is viewed as consisting of interrelated systems involving the author and the reader as autonomous systems, with their personalities, life histories, and literary competences; the text as a linguistic medium of communication possessing its own structure; and the socio-cultural environment in which both the author, the reader, and the text are immersed, with every system involved affecting and being affected by all the others. Systems constituting empirical reality interact (or are coupled) with one another by exchanging information and energy, the process that of necessity affects all the systems involved. (Sadowski 2000, 80)

Sadowski (2000) provides an example of such interaction: “during literary composition the author’s personality and life are in various ways affected by the writing process, as is the text itself in the sense that is being written, revised, edited, etc.” (80). The reader’s personality and life as well are to be affected in different ways by the reading process, and the text itself as “it can be glossed, annotated, edited, censored, banned, destroyed, etc.” (80). Wolfgang Iser spoke about the interaction of the text-reader: “reading is not a direct ‘internalization’, because it is not a one-way process . . . it is a dynamic *interaction* between text and reader,” and “every reading moment sends out stimuli into the memory, and what is recalled can activate the perspectives in such a way that they continually modify and so individualize one another” (as quoted in Sadowski 2000, 84).

*Trajectory****:*** Jens Brockmeier in his essay “Autobiographical Time” points out how narrative models of autobiographical time can render unique details into a life and consider these models of narrative as cultural trajectories “experienced and handled as issues of one’s own life time: …work, love, memory, death, and in the narrative life history which is meant to bind all this together” (2000, 71). To read more about autobiographical time, “chronotype” as it is termed by Bakhtin, I suggest an in-depth reading of Pauliane Amaral and Rauer Ribeiro Rodrigues’s (2015) work as it adds a multi-dimensional picture of the sophisticated narrative and discourse. This deeper understanding of autobiographical time is of great significance when attempting to analyze a novel.

According to Antonio Bolívar, Jesús Domingo Segovia, and Manuel Fernández Cruz (2001) “trajectories when narrated provide the construction of a sense of life—the story of this trajectory is not the result of what really happened in terms of experience and knowledge, but is the result of the organization of these elements as an argument with temporal dimension, space and multiple social relations” (as quoted in Abrahão 2012, 39). Brooke Harrington (2001) in her review of Paul Willis’s book *The Ethnographic Imagination*, cites his conclusion that the development of ideas in many autobiographies, a series of core concepts, are “loose and disconnected” (disorder), but “seem to follow the trajectory of the author’s development rather than any inherent conceptual logic” (659). Ordering ideas in this way from the author’s perspective rather than the reader’s can make this writing difficult to follow (659). The trajectory from the perspective of the author serves to show their development, while as ethnographers they offer a sense and meaning to social events; and according to Willis, that makes the discipline of ethnography an artful and creative field. While Willis could not propose how to apply his method to ethnographic imagination, I think the theory of complexity enables other ethnographers to adopt his methods.

*Butterfly Effect****:*** This feature was first recognized in meteorology. It is defined as an “unstable aperiodic behaviour in non-linear dynamical systems” (Majola-Leblond 2015, 169). The first to notice it was Edward Lorenz, who studied weather prediction at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. According to James Gleick in his book *Chaos, Making a New Science*, Lorenz was able to see more than just randomness in his weather model; he was also able to see “a fine geometrical structure, order masquerading as randomness” (as quoted in Majola-Leblond 2015, 169). Lorenz published a paper on deterministic chaos in 1963, to which he attached a picture “with just two curves on the right, one inside the other, and five on the left” (Gleick [1987] 2008, 139). This was not a simple task because these loops required 500 successive calculations on the computer (139). The drawing showed “a point moving along this trajectory in phase space, around the loops, illustrated in the slow, chaotic rotation of a fluid” (139). Although it was only a fragment, Lorenz’s drawing showed “a sort of double spiral, like a pair of butterfly wings interwoven with infinite dexterity. When the rising heat of his system pushed the fluid around in one direction, the trajectory stayed on the right wing; when the rolling motion stopped and reversed itself, the trajectory would swing across the other wing” (139–140). There was no way that an attractor would return to a point already visited. It could never intersect itself because that would mean repeating itself in the same periodic loop. The fascinating thing was that the “loops and spirals were infinitely deep, never quite joining, never intersecting. Yet they stayed inside a finite space, confined by a box” (140). Based on Lorenz’s research, Calire Majola-Leblond (2015) concludes that it appears “that chaotic systems are dynamical, non linear systems which exhibit Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions and whose apparently erratic behaviours in fact trace precise trajectories that fold and stretch along underlying structures known as strange attractors” (171). According to Siri Hustvedt, “no single theoretical model can contain the complexities of human realities” (as quoted in Majola-Leblond 2015, 167–168). It also cannot “provide a satisfactory way of interpreting a work of art” (Majola-Leblond 2015, 168). The butterfly effect can be applied to literary works that exhibit complexity and chaos to reach an understanding.

Wolfgang Iser’s *Prospecting, From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* asks questions that seem to mimic Lorenz’s work: “How shall we then describe the **dynamic** character of a text? Can one, in fact, assess the **keen disturbance** so often experienced in reading serious literature?” (as quoted in Majola-Leblond 2015, 171). Majola-Leblond (2015) follows up Wolfgang's concerns and argues that if “we pay close attention to words, it naturally follows that literary texts in general, and short stories in particular, are complex chaotic systems” (171).[[18]](#footnote-19) They are characterized as such systems because “they are dynamic, non linear systems. To exist, they combine writing and reading, two intensely dynamic processes” (171). A butterfly effect in a literary sense would be concerned with “how a tiny detail might have unfathomed consequences” (173). We can have an image of initial conditions that assist us to easily predict the issues that will encompass the story. But some issues are difficult to predict, although they are dependent on initial conditions that require a closer investigation into the structure of the story (178). I will use Lorenz’s weather model for understanding Mead’s literary text, which is tracing trajectories “in a chaotic system, deterministic, dynamic, and non-linear,” that “triggers a chaotic reading process” (175). By identifying these “chaotic lines” it will be possible to focus on the importance of this complexity (172). According to Majolo-Leblond “the power of the scene rests in tiny details,” and to figure out the unsettling, disturbing, and puzzling issues of the narrative and the narrator, we must follow several threads to reach an understanding (180, 185).

*Novelty:*Novelty in literature refers to “the innovative role of authors” (Kaufer and Geisler 1989, 288). The contribution of the author could be “tied to and shown to grow out of existing knowledge,” with newly defined boundary, i.e. “cutting edge” that allows for social organization to position it (288). Authors must find a place to make their imprint before others make theirs because “being the *first* to make an important scientific contribution is the only way to obtain recognition [for one’s] success” (William D. Garvey as quoted in Kaufer and Geisler 1989, 289). To become an innovative author, several parameters must be followed: “To be new, writers must acquire the consensual knowledge against which they will make their claim for change. The acquisition of consensual knowledge is thus an important prerequisite for newness” (Kaufer and Geisler 1989, 298). In addition, the author's “social networks [should] be rich,” and they should be part of “small working networks both inside and beyond their immediate institution” to obtain the latest consensual knowledge they need to become new (298). Besides networking skills, authors should be experts in their field. Thus, having a background framework is another parameter.

A knowledge of definitions and frameworks in literature is essential for serious writing and requires the author to focus on the information needed, summarize it, and direct readers towards something new (Kaufer and Geisler 1989, 299). Consensual knowledge, however, is something that “everyone knows,” and the reader can summarize “multiple paths across multiple texts|” (299). But several summaries can result in a fragmented picture, and the author must know how to “standardize” all this information into “common metalanguage” (299). According to Kaufer and Geisler, this process is called “synthesis knowledge” (299–300), in which authors can create a set of questions that would assist them in focusing on how different texts can be divided into different camps under the same topic, turning to an intertextual (synthesizing) approach (300). These social means and cognitive tools help the author to produce newness (300). Authors who proceed to engage with structures of knowledge that are more complex rather than mere facts will present a “ ‘theoretical’ nature of philosophical inquiry,” when in data-driven fields; and authors who contribute to the facts, especially to a field that is “data-poor,” will be recognized as “star” contributors (304). Those who provide new frameworks, including facts, will be more rewarded and accepted within their discipline (304). When we speak about novelty in texts, it does not mean that it should be “free of plagiarism” or written in the author’s voice; instead, we speak of creating new knowledge, an “invention” that adheres to the above-described parameters (305).

The relationship between novelty and complexity was studied by David J. Stang (1977). Early definitions of these two concepts emphasized striking similarities, and when it comes to functional similarity “it has been shown that ‘creative people’ tend to prefer complexity and tend to prefer novelty” (Barron 1963; Houston 1963 as quoted in Stang 1977, 318). D. E. Berlyne argues that “novelty and complexity are not always too easy to keep apart, as the more complex environments will generally offer the greatest of novel sights and smells” (as quoted in Stang 1977, 320). Stang and Crandall argue that there is still a lot to examine when it comes to social behavior, novelty, and complexity because

People who are anatomically asymmetrical, novel, or complex are stigmatized; people whose behavior is too novel or too complex are regarded as deviant, in need of “idiosyncrasy credit”; and even manuscripts without data may be judged by editors and reviewers as acceptable for some other journal. (Stang and Crandall as quoted in Stang 1977, 321)

## Conceptual Framework

Complexity theory and ethnographic autobiography have something in common. Both are still developing. There is no conceptual framework for the full spectrum of the process and outcome of ethnographic autobiography. To infer that a specific system or phenomena are complex and/or chaotic, it is necessary to properly use and process the complexity theory concepts. The concepts of complexity theory are still foreign to many scholars, and there is some uncertainty about their definitions, predominantly because they originate from mathematics and physics (Rickles, Hawe, and Shiell 2007, 933). My proposal is formed of a fusion of concepts from complexity theory discussed earlier and additional concepts originating in life-writing genres that are given below. The set of concepts is not definite, but it will present a new perception when the text is analyzed using the elements and concepts of complexity theory. It would not be the first time that complexity theory is used to study literary text (see, for example, Roghayeh Farsi’s work on “Chaos/Complexity Theory and Postmodern Poetry: A Case Study on Jurie Graham’s ‘Fuse’”). I believe it will provide a new perspective on Mead’s ethnographic autobiography within the broadest view as projected in this work.

### Bricolage

The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines bricolage as a “construction or (esp. literary or artistic) creation from a diverse range of materials or sources” (as quoted in Johnson 2012, 356). The selection and combination of the elements of bricolage are merely “informational” (Levi-Strauss as quoted in Johnson 2012, 363). The work assemblage, which is described by the French as bricolage, refers to the act of “fitting together of parts and pieces,” and it is an individual process of construction (Seitz as quoted in Dezeuze 2008, 31). The word was theorized in 1962 by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. For him, the bricoleur “ ‘speaks,’ not only with things . . . but also through things’” (1962, 32; Dezeuze 2008, 31). Levi-Strauss sees bricolage as “a process of destruction—or de-construction—and recombination” (as quoted in Johnson 2012, 359). This process could also be referred to as “reassignment” (359). According to Christopher Wibberley's (2012) work, “On the theoretical level, bricolage presumes a utilization of metaphors, such as quilting, montage, collage, weaving or sewing” (as quoted in Leete 2019, 5–6). Joe L. Kincheloe (2005) and Matt Rogers (2012) write that “Bricolage is not simply eclectic. It employs imaginative design, flexibility, and many perspectives” (as quoted in Leete 2019, 6).

Michel de Certeau’s book *The Practice of Everyday Life (*1980) uses the verb bricoler to depict how we participate in daily activities, like shopping or cooking. He claims that “people ‘tinker’ (bricolent) ‘with and within the dominant cultural economy to obtain innumerable and infinitesimal metamorphoses of its law into their interests and their own rules’ ” (as quoted in Dezeuze 2008, 33). De Certeau tried to define ordinary life as a complex subject of study that will need new methodologies (as quoted in Dezeuze 2008, 33). Bricolage is a universal concept; it is “a technical metaphor for a cognitive and creative process: the composition and generation of [a] discourse” (Johnson 2012, 358). It could be an activity and, in this case, will be “*combinatorial* in nature” (358). A bricolar is called a “handyman” or “handywoman,” or a “DIY man” or “DIY enthusiast” (360). The project of the bricoleur is “constrained by the historical density of the elements with which he works” (362). Levi-Strauss explains:

Consider him [the bricoleur] at work and excited by his project. His first practical step is retrospective. He has to turn back to an already existent set made up of tools and materials, to consider or reconsider what it contains and, finally and above all, to engage in a sort of dialogue with it and, before choosing between them, to index the possible answers which the whole set can offer to his problem. He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects [objets heteroclites] of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could “signify” and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialize but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts. (Brackets in the original) (as quoted in Johnson 2012, 362–363)

And while the metaphor of bricolage was established on the technical aspect of the term “tools and materials,” Levi-Strauss captures the term in its complete essence, a “process of selection and combination of the elements,” which turns the concept into informational (from the lexical field of information theory) (as quoted in Johnson 2012, 363).

Ken Plummer (2001) in his chapter titled “The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research” asks “from what bricolages and fragments does a person come to assemble their stories?” (399). The answer, according to Plummer, follows:

There are, for instance, significant others like parents, loved ones, teachers and friends who are the important people in a life who tell you the story of your life—of what you were like as a child, of how you were at school, of what happened on that first date. The stories they tell you feed back into the stories of your life. These others often tell you “the kind of person you are” and remind you of what you did in the past. Then there are the personal props: from diaries and photo albums to collections of clothes, books and records, “props” are deposited in a trail behind a life as it is lived. They can be regathered to enable a telling of a life. And a scanning of these helps to “restory the life”; to bring alive times, places, and people long since forgotten. (Plummer 2001, 399)

To link all this, the author must take on the act of remembering. A life story can only be seen as a narrative text, conforming to the conventions and practices needed for narrative writing (Plummer 2001, 399). Since the start of the twentieth century, the bricolage metaphor is assigned to the complexity of discourse and reflexive analysis (Leete 2019, 6). But applying a narrative bricolage does not provide or result in a meaning. If we are to analyze a life story, it should be connected to narrative analysis, which focuses on the story itself as a topic of examination. The plot requires “thickening” to attract the reader to the story (Plummer 2001, 399).

### Thick Description

As already mentioned, a bricolage is merely a technical aspect applied by the narrator to attach pieces of a story, but it does not provide any meaning to it. For this, it will be necessary to use “thick description.” Applying thick description used in qualitative research will provide an interpretation and meaning to the narrative.

Clifford Geertz appropriated Gilbert Ryle’s philosophical term of “thick description” to discuss works done in the field of ethnography (as quoted in Ponterotto 2006, 538-539). The validity “of the author’s interpretations, the context under which these interpretations were made must be richly and thickly described” (Ponterotto 2006, 539). Geertz claims that the “quality of ethnographic accounts or “thick descriptions” can be assessed “ ‘by their power’ to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers”: (as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 21)

It is not against a body of uninterpreted data, radically thinned descriptions, that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of the scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers. It is not worth it, as Thoreau said, to go round the world to count cats in Zanzibar. (as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 21)

Norman K. Denzin then spread the concept across disciplines such as communication, sociology, and the humanities (Ponterotto 2006, 540). The significance of this concept, according to Denzin, lies within its ability to “insert history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Denzin 1989, as quoted in Ponterotto 2006, 540).

An ethnographer using thick description, according to Zoe Bray, provides many levels and sources of interpretation, which cannot be said about the use and the product of empirical and participatory observations done by ethnographers during field research (Bray 2015, 119). Applying thick description will provide a “dense, visual analysis” (119). This so-called “informative, enlightening, accumulative, transformative, and intersubjective” process characterizes ethnography and anthropology’s current methodology (119). What Bray refers to as thick description has more to do with Geertz’s definition of the term as “a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [the ethnographer] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (as quoted in Bray 2015, 119). The ethnographer can “render” in writing or painting, according to Bray (Bray 2015, 119). This example only shows the creative side that the ethnographer chooses to apply when using a thick description. Bray uses David MacDougall's claims about “the ability of (film and photographic) images to render certain complexities that the text may not” (as quoted in Bray 2015, 120). He also includes Lucien Taylor’s argument on the “analytical potential of using the visual (again film and photographs)” in favor of applying a method such as thick description within science-ethnography (as quoted in Bray 2015, 120).

There have been recent advances in the field of anthropology to recognize art. Anthropologists are now discussing how anthropology and art can be intertwined. The only challenge that remains is that each discipline still has different standards of measurements. It takes work to achieve the “anthropologist-artist” title, as one needs to be fully trained in both practices (Bray 2015, 120).

### Narrative Identity, Identity Construction, and Identity Commitment

Dan P. McAdams et al. (2006) discuss narrative identity, levels of short-term (3-month) and longer-term (3-year) continuity and personal growth in their work “Continuity and Change in the Life Story: A Longitudinal Study of Autobiographical Memories in Emerging Adulthood.” Based on their study, they claim that “narrative identity itself is typically not viewed to be as stable as are traits, and the open-ended thematic methods used to assess individual differences in narrative identity are somewhat less controlled and predictable” (1390). Previous studies also concluded that “some features of narrative identity may show continuity over time,” going against social scientists “who see narrative as an antidote to trait conceptions and other approaches they deem to be static and reductionistic … From this point of view, life stories are discursive performances that are not expected to show continuity over time and across situations” (Shotter and Gergen, 1989; Smythe as quoted in McAdams et al. 2006, 1390).

Dan P. McAdams et al. (2006) also explain that narrative approaches are helpful in the study of change and development: “Over time and experience, narrative identity is expected to change considerably more than dispositional traits, and narrative methods would appear to be more open to change and nuance compared to self-report trait scales” (1394). The scholars summarize their study by stating that “future research on narrative identity promises to shed new light on both continuity and change in personality from emerging adulthood into midlife and beyond” (1396). After reading Mead’s autobiography, it is possible to establish that her work offers short-term levels of continuity and growth, but also long-term continuity from childhood to adulthood and further. However, the narrative identity provided in these sections presents complex patterns, which can be understood and enhanced through complexity theory.

In this research, I apply Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean’s (2013) definition of narrative identity: “Narrative identity is a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” (233). Researchers found that the relationship between life stories and adaptation will provide the narrators “redemptive meanings in suffering and adversity,” including personal agency and inquiry (233). The link between life stories and development can be observed through the narrator’s meaning-making from accounts of the adolescent into adulthood years (233). The relation of growth to life stories is significant, and the primary focus should be on the role of the cultural context in the development of narrative identity (233). Narrative identity not only provides clarity for the author but also to the reader. This concept enables the author to reveal to themselves and others who they are, what made them the person they are now, and where they see themselves in the future, a kind of foretelling.

Narrative identity is a modern term. The act of forming an identity by constructing a life story has been utilized only for two decades, mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Stories of adaptation and suffering feature the narrator’s explorations of a negative experience, the emotions the experience provoked, why it happened, what it may result in, and what function this experience has on the narrator’s life. The narrator will then proceed towards a favorable resolution of the specific experience. The first phase relates to personal growth, while the second is more about seeking happiness. Stories of loss and struggle will resonate a higher level of a narrator’s psychological maturity, and these accounts focus more on “learning, growth, and positive personal transformation” (Bauer, McAdams, and Sakaeda as quoted in McAdams and McLean 2013, 235).

The significance of narrative identity to a person’s health is of value when learning about the process of development that the narrator goes through when writing a story about the self. Drawing on Erik H. Erikson’s theory of psychological development, McAdams in his book (1985) claims that narrative identity is the product of late-adolescent and early adult years, influenced by societal expectations on identity and maturation (as quoted in McAdams and McLean 2013, 235). Building on Vygotskian theory, Kate C. McLean, Monisha Pasupathi, and Jennifer L. Pals (2007) created a sociocultural model to analyze narrative identity development. Their model shows how narrative identity evolves gradually when a person takes the act of telling a story to and with others. In other words, “over developmental time, selves create stories, which in turn create selves” (as quoted in McAdams and McLean 2013, 235). The storyteller goes through a learning process compatible with their cultural limits and group, be it family, friends, formal or informal social contexts. McAdams and McLean claim that there should be more studies about the link between narrative identity development and culture’s role.

Nahla Nadeem’s work is established upon McAdams’s theory and his definition of autobiographical narrative, “ ‘a selective reconstruction of the ruminative past,’ and an account that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be whom s/he is at present” (as quoted in Nadeem 2015, 224). Drawing from McAdam’s work on narrative identity as a theoretical framework, Nadeem builds an identity construction model that presumes the following: the person engaging in the act of narration can construct a sense of who they are and the reality they are part of. This is done by digging through and finding meaning to past experiences and events. Present reflection on past events and contrariwise is an integral part of this process. A productive model of analysis, according to Nadeem, will provide the following:

a) A revaluation of the narrated stories by merging identity themes that reflect different aspects of identity: “individual, relational, and collective and at the same time provide interpretive frames ‘a lens to see through the events’ ” (Nadeem 2015, 230).

b) The narrator’s reflection on their life stories through ruminative past resulting in how it influenced the way they are now.

c) Observations of the interrelationship of the narrator’s change of tense from past narrative passages to present as linguistic proof for the “concept of evolving self” that will show how identity exploration that occurs through the act of narration is associated with the assessment/viewpoint process that results through the act of reflecting on the other (226).

Applying a critical discourse analysis (CDA) will approve Nadeem’s model. Using this approach will enable the investigator to follow the interconnections discussed above. This model helps to unfold how autobiographical narrative becomes the reflection of the psycho-sociolinguistic practice of identity construction (Nadeem 2015, 226). As mentioned in McAdam’s work, in which he “examines the personal development and intricate display of culture in narrative identity,” Nadeem’s proposed model makes the process of exploration and sense-making clear (Nadeem 2015, 228). Her model provides a transparent process that results in the final product of the narrator’s “commitment or rejection of social categories” (229). McAdams (2011) explains: “Narrative identity, therefore, reflects gender and class divisions and the patterns of economic, political, and cultural hegemony that prevail at a given point in a society’s history” (as quoted in Nadeem 2015, 229).

### Narrative Competence

In *The Culture of Education* (1996), Jerome Bruner explains that attainment of narrative competence is only beginning to find acceptance. There is still work to be done when it comes to understanding the term. There is no place yet for this concept in the academic or educational curriculum, even though it is a fundamental part of children’s upbringing. Marianne Horsdal (2012) names sixteen features that narrative competence comprises. Some of them are evident in autobiographies, in which the narrator provides a storyline that begins with his or her upbringing, family, education, culture, and community.

The first is autonoetic consciousness. It is an essential condition for the rest of the activities, a competence that can be achieved in the second or third year of a child’s life, conditional to the social surrounding in which the child grows up. It relates to the child’s state of knowing that the world is divided into past, present, and future. This transitory realization may be harmed by inexorable trauma. Another significant condition is articulateness, which refers to the child’s ability to master language fluently. Horsdal (2012) claims that “the power of expression is the first condition for having a voice” (63). Through practice, the child learns to express themselves. An interesting fact in this case, as Horsdal points out, is that life stories show that talented storytellers come from storytelling families. They had the opportunity to observe and be part of the “storytelling experience” and engage in storytelling activities which eventually leads them to be great narrators. This function also requires expressing emotions, sensations, thoughts, all part of narrative competence (63).

To be a great narrator means also to know how to integrate an experience into the narrative. Modern narrators go through life changes, and this instability may require a quick adaptation to shifts and a new interpretation of life. Autobiographical memory is flexible because it enables us to remember what has been left “the same,” even if there have been some developments since (Horsdal 2012, 63). According to Daniel J. Siegel, change occurs across time. Integration is necessary to enable individuals to adjust to the “order and chaos” they have been through in their lives (as quoted in Horsdal 2012, 64). Narrators should also be capable of regulating their own emotions. The construction of coherent narratives requires the narrator to conform to his or her “self” or the self of another (Horsdal 2012, 64). This means to accept a scale of emotions that was triggered by various events. The narrative itself also provides a vehicle for regulating emotions (64). Narratives include emotional aspects, and there is an existing connection between the regulation of emotion and narrative (64). The narrator should also go through a cognitive process of sense-making. Horsdal defines this function as “making sense of what happened before and what is happening now, and how these things are connected” (64). The narrator is focused on problem-solving tasks, searching for an explanation for different actions, and constructing meaning. To go forward, there is a need to rethink the past. The narrative plotline is what assists the narrator in understanding the world they live in and the way they interact with it (65). Stories become fables, which can assist in planning future actions (Turner as quoted in Horsdal 2012, 65). But meaning does not always derive from existing cultural patterns; sometimes, there is a need to build a new meaning that goes against common attitudes.

To produce a narrative, the narrator needs to go through identity work and be committed to the process of “becoming.” This aspect addresses the way(s) in which the narrator is affected by different life developments and the questions that he or she must deal with: “How will this transformation influence [the] interpretation of self? What self will emerge in interactions in new places, new relationships, and new situations? And how will this emerging self connect to, or transform, prior interpretations and constructions of self and identity?” (Horsdal 2012, 65).

The next element of narrative competence is future planning. The narrator should know who they are, where exactly they are, or how they found their way there if they want to plan. It is not possible, according to Horsdal, to make plans if the narrator is preoccupied with the present or dreads memories. The appropriate choice of a future is no longer heritably bound but is a personal choice. There is also no one simple plan, according to Horsdal, and there should be more alternatives. The idea of “re-planning” is a learning process and should be part of the narrative (Horsdal 2012, 66).

The narrator should also be able to include in their work different perspectives. Mary Catherine Bateson explains this function of narrative competence:

The quality of improvisation characterizes more and more lives today, lived in uncertainty, full of inklings of alternatives. In a rapidly changing and interdependent world, single models are less likely to be viable and plans more likely to go awry. The effort to combine multiple models risks the disasters of conflict and runaway misunderstanding, but the effort to adhere blindly to some traditional model for a life risks disaster not only for the person who follows it but for the entire system in which he or she is embedded, indeed for all the other living systems with which that life is linked. (as quoted in Horsdal 2012, 66)

Thus, the narrator should be able to write about an experience or event from various perspectives because it is impossible to grasp a situation from one viewpoint fully. The next function that follows directly from providing multiple perspectives to an event or experience is negotiation of meaning. The fact that the narrator can give several views means that they can also mediate and seek different meanings. To achieve diverse meanings and to be able to look at things differently, the narrator should be open-minded. Imagination and a supportive environment that enables the person to follow their curiosity are fundamental for developing open-mindedness. The culture plays a significant role in this case because it provides, or not, the platform for the narrator to express themself, knowing they will be listened to. Thus, there is a connection between culture and open-mindedness.

To register perspectives of others as well means that the narrator should also know how to be attentive, the ability to closely listen to what the other has to say and provide the needed space for the other to raise his or her voice. Children learn to tell stories by listening to others, such as family and guests. Today, in the modern world, older people listen to younger ones. But it does not exempt the fact that you first need to listen to a story to tell a story. It is only logical that the next function of narrative competence will be understanding others’ minds. This function addresses developmental psychology and how it is observed in young children. The child gradually obtains the competence to understand that others can have their own opinions, different information, or feelings on various topics.

Part of the process of becoming a great narrator is attributed to community building. According to Horsdal, “shared stories constitute a common fund of collective knowledge and memory.” Through sharing stories people come together, communities are built, and the future is planned. The narrator should provide affiliation, a “sense of belonging” to a family, institution, organization, or some type of community, real or imagined (Horsdal 2012, 67).

Dialogical communication is another function of narrative competence. Listening does not mean that the person should agree to what is said. Being aware of another perspective does not suggest that the person should appropriate the opinion of the interrogator. Dialogical communication aims to enrich the “interpretive framework.” The narrator can find “sameness and … otherness” in interpretations of others (Horsdal 2012, 68).

In *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (1994), Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash explain how to view the modern world as a complex social structure and process (as quoted in Braun 1996, 752). The authors’ analyses show the implications of modernity within the general frame of comprehending modern institutions as “self-reflexive” (e.g., self-controlled) (as quoted in Braun 1996, 753). Within this context, reflexivity is used professionally for organizational development. But social change also affects individuals. A “reflexive renegotiation[n] of identity and autobiography” is needed if the individual wishes to carry out a fruitful life (Horsdal 2012, 68). The person should be able to reflect on his or her actions and their meanings. This concept of “metacognition” is a broad one and requires the individual to think about how he or she thinks, providing new interpretations and perspectives (68). This also includes taking into consideration historical and cultural influences (68).

The narrator should also have an analytic ability. The individual should be able to analyze a story and consider diverse aspects such as moral significance, themes, plot, genre, and voices (Horsdal 2012, 68). Analytic ability requires “learn[ing] through practice” (68). Part of this learning process is a pedagogic intervention. We already know from the function of open-mindedness that a supportive culture and environment is essential for individual creative growth and, consequently, narrative construction. The study of Robyn Fivush et al. (2011) sheds light on the contribution of family relatives to this development:

Parents who structure more elaborated coherent personal narratives with their young children have children who, by the end of the preschool years, provide more detailed and coherent personal narratives, and show a more differentiated and coherent sense of self. … adolescents begin to use culturally available canonical biographical forms, life scripts, and master narratives to construct a life story and inform their own autobiographical narrative identity. This process continues to be socially constructed in local interactions; [there is] evidence that parents help adolescents structure life narratives during coconstructed reminiscing and that adolescents use parents and families as a source for their own autobiographical content and structure. (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, and Zaman 2011, 321)

Horsdal adds to this function the role of educators in encouraging creativity through their interaction with their pupils, leading to the production of narratives.

A narrator should know how to make a narrative breakdown. There is a difference between “a cohesive narrative” that is defined by fixed perceptions of events, and a “coherent” narrative that requires a fluid process that will produce coherence (Siegel as quoted in Horsdal 2012, 70). If the individual has a solid understanding of how things are, knows how to structure narratives of self and the world they live in, it is more likely that rigorous perceptions will break down. A narrator should use a continuity process when writing a narrative about the self and be able “to establish a narrative connection between present and past selves” (71). If there is no meaning, it is dangerous and may result in chaos. If there is no link between past and present, and the individual is stuck in the past, it will be impossible “to be present, here and now, to sense, experience” or plan a future (72). Stories have a psychological value, and they can function as problem solvers, a space in which an individual’s mental state can be relished and healed. If the individual does not share the thoughts and emotions that weaken or hurt them, it could lead to loneliness and anxiety.

### Aesthetic Value and Cognitive Value

As in the case of our reading of Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, aesthetic value resides in the blooming of imagination (the sublime) standing on the feet of cognitive value (the knowledge). While aesthetic value is the wings of literature, cognitive value is the feet of it.

Monroe C. Beardsley argues the following:

I say that the aesthetic value of anything is its capacity to impart, through the adequate apprehension of it, a market aesthetic character to experience—on the supposition that the presence of that aesthetic character itself confers value on that experience.… If the aesthetic value is a benign capacity—that is, a capacity to produce something worth having—it is distinguished from other values by its target: the imparting of aesthetic character to experience. …The grounds of aesthetic value are those properties of the object— including literary works—that give the object its aesthetic value, that enable it to exercise its aesthetic capacity, when the right receiver comes along. (Beardsley 1981, 239–240)

If we take on this approach, then an aesthetic value is defined as a capacity involving the experience of the aesthetic object. The object or character, in this case, is the imagined picture of the subject. An aesthetic value of a literature piece is determined by the effect of the character on the personal experience in an imaginative, creative, innovative, diverse, or metaphysical way. For example, children can be the leaves of a tree. They are fed by the tree roots (which are the parents—this is the object of character). However, they can be perceived by subject individuals differently depending on cultural background and personal experience.

There is, however, a dispute concerning the existence of aesthetic value, meaning its independent existence or its effect as the capacity to define artwork and art itself. When it comes to this dispute, it exists among theories regarding the literary value (synonymous the aesthetic value). There is a need for a more precise definition of the concepts. Britt Harrison comments on Rafe McGrefor’s assessment of literary value in “The Value of Literature”:

The literary value of literature does not depend on a work’s moral or cognitive value, and as such literary value is autonomous. But what about aesthetic value? With reference to aesthetic value almost entirely absent, one is left wondering whether McGregor takes the aesthetic value of a work to be (i) one and the same as its literary value; (ii) the value produced by a reader’s focus on (and experience) of a work’s formal axis only; (iii) some other instrumental value, whose very instrumentality rules it out of consideration as a final value; or (iv) something that drops out of the picture having been made redundant by literary thickness. (Harrison 2018, 335)

When it comes to autoethnography and aesthetic value, Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) write that “when researchers write autoethnographies, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience” (277). However, “as part autobiography, autoethnography is dismissed for autobiographical writing standards, as being insufficiently aesthetic and literary and not artful enough. Autoethnographers are viewed as catering to the sociological, scientific imagination and trying to achieve legitimacy as scientists. Consequently, critics say autoethnography disregards the literary, artistic imagination and the need to be talented artists (Gingrich-Philbrook as quoted in Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011, 283). Pamela Moro (2006), for example, “believes it takes a “darn good” writer to write autoethnography” (as quoted in Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011, 283). As seen, autobiographers can consider their work to be art, but others would not recognize it as such because practicing art does not lead to art. The question is, to be canonical or not to be? It could depend on the aesthetic value. The other question is, can we find purely aesthetic value? Or can aesthetic value appear without the assistance of cognitive value? Thus, will knowledge exist without the process of imagination and understanding? To briefly explain, knowledge is the cognitive value; and the process of imagination needed to comprehend the information that leads to new knowledge and understanding is the aesthetic character.

Beardsley thus writes:

To pose it in a manageable way without oversimplification, let us consider the relationship between aesthetic value and one other value, which I call cognitive. Taken broadly, cognitive value is the capacity to contribute to the advancement of our understanding or knowledge. I have to take it that the target of this value is reasonably well understood—despite the problems that epistemologists can easily point out. (I designate it as “understanding of knowledge,” just in case anyone thinks there may be an increase in understanding that is not an increase in knowledge, or vice versa). I also have to concede that the grounds of this value are extraordinarily diverse, so I do not propose to try to catalog or classify them. But there is such a value as cognitive value. (Beardsley 1981, 243)

From Beardsley’s work, we can understand that there is a relationship between aesthetic value and cognitive value regarding their roles in acquiring knowledge and understanding. Antony Aumann’s 2014 work “The Relationship Between Aesthetic Value and Cognitive Value” also shows that a work’s aesthetic value influences its cognitive value.

Therefore, there is a connection between these two values. Fiction, aesthetics, craft, and art have a relationship and that is to evoke experience (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 179–180). The aesthetic value depends much on the structure of the work and how parts relate to each other producing a whole (Richardson and Lockridge as quoted in Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 184). Several literary techniques contribute to the aesthetics of a piece: characterization, believability, narrative movement, and setting the scene (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 184).

### Ethnographic Fiction

According to Tobias Hecht in *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel*, ethnographic fiction is:

An approach to the study and evocation of social life and the world of the mind that emerges from rigorous observation, makes use of certain conventions of ethnographic fieldwork and writing, but also employs literary devices. It is inspired by observation over the long run, based on recognizable scenarios, and treats a particular moment. It is not, however, restricted by these things; it takes liberties with reality. (Hecht 2006, 8)

It is not new that literary and fictional techniques are applied in ethnography. Works such as ethnographic novels, memoirs, confessionals, and short stories started to emerge from the late-nineteenth century through the 1970s. More and more works were written in reflexive and narrative styles (Tedlock as quoted in Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 182). During the twentieth century, a lot of ethnographic works were based on “facts”—“from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who speaks (typically) for non-Western peoples without acknowledging or accounting for the historical, political, and intersubjective realities of ethnographic interaction” (Marcus and Cushman as quoted in Jacobson and Larsen 2014,182). The first-person voice of the ethnographer did not exist. But a critical reflection of this genre during the 1970s shows how ethnographers applied literary techniques and narrative conventions that “conceal the material and political relationships that make ethnography possible as a professional practice and literary genre” (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 183). Ethnographers created literary works on purpose “that *depend* on the artful use of language to organize, explain, and convey the complex realities of cultural life” (183).

Furthermore, in *Women Writing Culture*, Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon present a collection of texts written by women whose voices were omitted or marginalized (as quoted in Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 183). These texts are crucial for communicating the need to restore intellectual property that has been excluded from scholarly works such as *Writing Culture, The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. According to Matt Jacobson and Soren C. Larsen, Behar and Gordon:

Sought to liberate styles of representation long considered inferior to the scholarly monograph. The collection featured plays, short stories, poems, biographies, life histories, fiction, and fieldwork accounts, which provided a slate of models for creative writing in ethnography. (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 183)

The book was written to raise awareness towards women’s anthropological works, which were designed to suit a man’s world and did not fully expose women’s voices or have been excluded from critical scholarship that evaluated anthropological achievements. Overall, ethnographic fiction is a tool that researchers can apply when choosing to engage in creative research and writing for new audiences, not necessarily scholars. Using this method merges different genres, arts, and science.

Sundar Sarukkai makes timely comments in his article on the nature of fiction and anthropology:

Fiction stands as the exemplar of subjective construction of the world. Anthropology, by its exclusion of the subjective position by objectifying human communities and by creating the anthropological other, can have no use of fiction. This distancing of fiction is best exemplified by the way anthropological other is constructed, as based on difference and clearly referential. The ambiguity of the other is repressed in order to get as ‘true’ a picture as possible. Within such a dogma, fiction, by its exploding possibilities, in its refusal to exile the subject, is immediately ruled out. (Sarukkai 1997, 1409)

However, Sarukkai emphasizes the importance of using fiction as a method in ethnography. He claims that it can produce subjective orientations about the world, which will go beyond the “objective” domain of ethnography and enrich our knowledge (1409).

The meaning of “narratology” concerns stories of “*all* kinds, fictional and otherwise” (Genette, Ben-Ari, and McHale 1990, 755). The discourse of factual narratorly includes among the rest:

Practices as history, biography, diaries, newspaper stories, police reports, judicial *narratio*, everyday gossip, and other forms of what Mallarme called ‘l’universel reportage’— or, at the very least, a systematic analysis of certain major and supposedly typical texts, such as Rousseau’s *Confessions* or Michelet’s *Histoire de la Revolution francaise.* (Genette, Ben-Ari, and McHale 1990, 756)

Being a factual narrative and a fictional narrative means that the story or the so-called “report” is “truthful” on the one hand and fictional on the other, “invented by someone, whether the present storyteller or someone from whom the latter has inherited the story” (Genette, Ben-Ari, and McHale 1990, 756–757).

According to *Life-Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms* by Donald J. Winslow, faction is defined as “a blending of fact and fiction” (1995, 20). Daniel Chandler writes that

Despite the importance of the distinction between fictional and non-fictional genres, it is important also to note the existence of various hybrid forms (such as docudrama, ‘faction’ and so on). Even within genres acknowledged as factual (such as news reports and documentaries), ‘stories’ are told [for] the purposes of factual genres in the mass media include entertaining as well as informing. (Chandler, 11-12)

Faction is also used by Lois R. Kuznets (1982) “to label [the] concept of the true life story” (96). She claims that the “products of such an approach as faction [are]: works of prose fiction based exclusively on gathered ‘facts’ or ‘true life stories,’ according to their authors” (98). Faction is chosen by authors who want to write “an authentic reproduction of real life” (101). Oliver Conolly and Bashshar Haydar (2008) note in *The Case Against Faction* that “faction has … two principal limitations in comparison to fiction. The first is its inability to explore themes. The most obvious difficulty for the writer of faction who wishes to explore a given theme is that he is constrained by the facts, whereas the writer of fiction is not” (350). However, the author of faction does have some liberty, of course, when choosing the story he or she wants to share, and the facts they want to be accessible to their reader (this includes the author’s choice when to present them in the story and how to narrate them). The author has the ability “to present a story in a literary manner that is constrained entirely by fact” (Conolly and Haydar 2008, 350).

Faction is a hybrid term. Laurel Richardson writes that:

Some ethnographers, now, desire their work to be both “scientific” [based more on facts] and “literary.” …We recognize the historical split between scientific and literary writing that emerged in the 17th century as unstable and mutable. We have welcomed the blurring of genre, the complexity of writing, the shaggy boundaries between “fact” and “fiction,” “subjective” and “objective,” “true” and “imagined.” We smile at the oxymoronic genre namings: creative nonfiction; faction; ethnographic fiction; the nonfiction novel; and true fiction. (Richardson 2000, 253)

Ethnographers became more interested in writing scientific ethnography—“in the sense of being true to a world known through the empirical senses” and literary— “in the sense of expressing what one has learned through evocative writing techniques and form” (Richardson 2000, 253).

According to Michael Sinding (2010), the concept of faction can relate to “fictionalized autobiography [which] may mix real with fictional names and experiences (as in much metafiction). The writer’s historical and social milieu may be of as much concern as his/her own existence and individual life” (111). Sinding quotes Nussbaum and Lejeune in his essay, writing that “the selves of early eighteenth-century diaries and journals are often fragmentary and inconsistent … [and] twentieth-century intellectual autobiographies often challenge conventional assumptions about the genre (e.g., those of Sartre, Nabokov, Barthes, Michel Leiris)” (as quoted in Sinding 2010, 111).

In the analysis chapter, I address the concept of faction as a continuum of “fictivity” ranging from a completely ethnographic fiction to an ethnography that is completely based on facts (the fusion of facts in ethnographic genres of life writing).

### The Self and the Other

Anthropologists have their own travel histories. The anthropologist and the tourist differ based on their experiences and under which conditions the journey supports the inquiry into the relationship between the self and the other. Using the descriptions that provide structure and meaning to the experience in the process of narration, the traveler can reflect on their journey and the ways that generate images of self and identity (Neuman as quoted in Galani-Moutafi 2000, 205). The journey that the traveler goes through can “be seen as a type of *passage* in time … that symbolizes the simultaneous discovery of self and the Other” (Galani-Moutafi 2000, 205). Vasiliki Galani-Moutafi (2000) claims that “one reaches a self-realization in view of that from whom he/she differs,” meaning that identity can be produced through the image of the Other(205). Within ethnography, fieldwork is the tool that allows an encounter—interpersonal and intercultural—with the Other(206). Throughout history, ethnography was based on the premise of a scientific field that studied the difference between the West and the non-Western cultures. Meaning, the non-Western Other has been analyzed by the Western self.

Anthropology was established as a scientific field, and as such, the method used for writing accounts by ethnographers was scientific and produced for scholars. Thus, while the text provided an experience of encounter with the Other, it was still written in an objective scientific manner. This led to the omission of “the conditions under which each ethnography was created, particularly, the involvement and attitude-intersubjective, moral and political-of its writer” (Thornton as quoted in to Galani-Moutafi 2000, 207). The late nineteenth century saw a rise in mass tourism. The difference between travel and tourism was evident because the first was “lacking initiative and discrimination” between the self and the other culture; the latter is taken “as a resource in the endeavor of self-realization,” merging the tourist experience with the culture (Galani-Moutafi 2000, 210). Tourists are not concerned with the need to change the world (Rojek as quoted in Galani-Moutafi 2000, 210). The difference between tourism and the traveler also stems from the discourse in which each engages.

While the tourist travels to have fun, the traveler seeks to visit other cultures for educational means, being challenged by how they can better observe another culture (Galani-Moutafi 2000, 210). In the twentieth century, it was Malinowski who changed the face of the anthropologist's travel practice by actively taking part in the society of the Other (213). This transformation changed the way fieldwork and research are done. It presented new insights about the ethnographer and how autobiography can be used to explain ethnography. In this case, there was an established connection between the ethnographer’s fieldwork and experience with the field of ethnography. Suppose one wishes to clarify what ethnographic travel requires; in that case, they must study how the ethnographer reveals their experience with the other culture, how it is presented in the framework of the ethnographic text, and how eventually the ethnographer, as a writer, produces the self and the Other (213). Because of the scientific nature of the discipline, ethnographers used the first person, I, in their ethnographic treatises, to lend legitimacy to their research and their part as informants, a rightful representative of the studied culture. Other than that, the Idid not appear in these works, meaning there was no place to elaborate on the “personal” (214). But the ethnographer found solace in literature, writing autobiographies and diaries. And today, “the boundary between literary travel and academic fieldwork, as well as between academic analysis and travel narrative, is renegotiated” (216).

In turn, “reflexive anthropology has come to critique the emotional/objective boundary and accept fieldwork’s functioning as an inner journey, the anthropologist is obliged to recognize his/her experience as well as the emotional responses to what he/she experiences” (Rosaldo as quoted in Galani-Moutafi 2000, 217). During fieldwork, the anthropologist’s journey could include reflections[[19]](#footnote-20) upon their own culture, questioning identity, and mainly going through new emotions (Galani-Moutafi 2000, 217). It could be suggested that ethnographers seek inside information of Others so they can fix their claims about their culture (220). It could also be said, “that the images and stories they produce about Others are directly linked to their own identities and interests which lie in their home culture” (222). In my analysis, I will not focus on the “I” and the “Other” alone but on their interactions, interpretations, and interconnectedness within the context and space that they share.

### Hybridity

In recent years, the notion of hybridity has become popular in genre studies and used in contemporary literature (Allen 2013, 3). The definition of this concept refers to a particular genre-mixing: “many critics [have been inspired] to apply the notion of ‘hybridity’ to literature which combines different genres in their fictional critique of hegemonic discourses” (3). David Duff defines generic hybridization as “[t]he process by which two or more genres combine to form a new genre or subgenre; or by which elements of two or more genres are combined in a single work” (as quoted in Allen 2013, 3). The concept of ‘hybridization’ in this case presents the author’s “experimentation with genre conventions” (Hassan as quoted in Allen 2013, 3). The terms “blurring” or “dissolution” of genre boundaries can explain the process (Hutcheon 1988; Duff as quoted in Allen 2012, 3). Ansgar Nunning, for example, speaks of hybrid genres:

Which integrate factual material into fictional narratives, such as the ‘New Journalism’ and the ‘nonfiction novels,’ ‘historiographic metafiction,’ ‘documentary fiction,’ a revisionist type of ‘postmodernist historical novel,’ ‘uchronian fantasy,’ ‘paprahistorical novels,’ and ‘factfiction’. (Nunning as quoted in Allen 2013, 3)

In her definition of “hybrid genres,” Julia Ernst speaks of literary forms that intertwine characteristics of different genres and can no longer be labeled within the genre classifications used in the Western tradition because they cannot convey the conventional genre categorization. Because of this fluidity, texts can be associated with more than one genre. In the following chapter, I intend to examine how Mead in her autobiography subverts the genre conventions, the inconsistencies that arise in her autobiography by including ethnography, and whether the notion of hybridity that she uses in her autobiography “undermine or even explode traditional categories” (Allen 2013, 5).

Lara Feigel and Max Saunders (2012), in their edited collection of life-writing works, concentrate on the issue of hybridity and the mediation that occurs in life writing genres. They quote Derrida who “argued in ‘The Law of Genre’ that texts ‘participate’ in genres to which they cannot ‘belong’” (as quoted in Feigel and Saunders 2012, 241). They state that there is no such thing as ‘pure’ genre because life writing itself as a term is hybrid (Feigel and Saunders 2012, 241). Addressing mediation in auto/biographic forms, the first level of mediation, according to Alfred Hornung,[[20]](#footnote-21) is done “between the self and the world,” when the memory of the self mediates between the present and the past, a personal process (Hornung as quoted in Feigel and Sauders 2012, 242).

But memories are not mediated only by us, they are also mediated by our culture. Astrid Erll claims that “even our most personal memories are *cultural* (this is something which Maurice Halbwachs has drawn attention to as early as the 1920s)” (as quoted in Feigel and Saunders 2012, 242). Personal memories, according to Feigel and Sauders, “are shaped by our cultural contexts” (Feigel and Saunders 2012, 242). It could be the culture of family, gender, art, etc. Hornung argues that the second level of mediation is concerned with the technique “between the author and the chosen medium of self-representation” (as quoted in Feigel and Saunders 2012, 242). In this case, the mediation is the author’s “choice of the medium as well as the way of working within it (or them)” (Feigel and Saunders 2012, 243). This level of mediation can be called “transdisciplinary methodology” because it can inspect how life writing collaborates with other disciplines—such as creative fiction, sociology, cultural studies, and more.

### Intertextuality

Duff (2002) defines intertextuality as a broad term for “any critical procedure or creative practice involving a relation between two or more texts” (54). The term was coined by Julia Kristeva, based on Mikhail Bakhtin's work (58). Roland Barthes speaks of this “inter-text” as problematic because it “does not recognize any division of genre” (as quoted in Duff 2002, 55). It goes against the conventional attitude towards the term “genre” as regarded by literary theory: “conformity, predictability, standardization, the inertia of tradition” (Duff 2002, 56). But intertextuality functions as a fix for genre-mixing within a text: “Reconceived in terms of ‘intertextuality’, genre could shed its authoritarian connotations, remove the taint of prescriptiveness, and rid itself of its traditional roles as arbiter or policeman of the writing and reading process” (57). To apply this method means to welcome the aspect of the intertextuality of life writing. If a biography is intertextual, it will use documentary sources and refer to letters and conversations and memoirs and interviews with the subject (Feigel and Saunders 2012, 243).

Autobiography can also be intertextual; while an author uses their interiorities and memories, they can also include quotations from their diaries and letters and texts written about them by other people. In this case, the intertext will often include texts from different genres: letters, diaries, other documents—texts from the autobiographer or others, and not from the same kind of writing—the subject’s earlier autobiography, or citations from others’ autobiographies (Feigel and Saunders 2012, 243).

# Analysis

Following the approach of a complex case study suggested by Lindsay Hetherington (2013), I will try to look at *Blackberry Winter* through the lances of complexity theory. I decided to look at many of the concepts used by ethnographers that, according to recent research, are considered to be systems with adaptive characteristics, and my emphasis will be on the dynamics of the system, the relationships of the diverse elements, the interactions between the different systems, and the outcomes that follow the nonlinear causality determined by the interplay of the whole (the orchestrated actions of the systems).

The journey to find answers to why Mead’s autobiography is full of omissions, chaos, art, and science resulted in no obvious explanation. Confusion occurred no matter in what direction I chose to look at her work. But that was the enigma; perhaps there is more than one way to explore and analyze Mead’s autobiography. To understand Mead’s way of thinking, I decided to first learn about her perspective towards her work and life.

James Grier Miller’s (1980) work “Margaret Mead” is based on his interview with Mead. They were once colleagues who worked on the developing systems theory (1). Mead explained in the interview that people from various disciplines “were all beginning to understand that … [they need] to think about total systems and realize that cutting anything up into small bits and attempting to analyze it is not satisfactory form of analysis” (2). Inspired by her professor, Franz Boas, she concluded that “everything is related to everything else” (2). She “looked at the function of one thing in a society and then how the integration of the whole came from the relation of the parts” (2). The role of the anthropologist according to Mead is to look “at a whole society, whereas all the other social sciences were looking at one aspect of the society” (2). The term society evolved into the present term of a system—but at the time an anthropologist used the word “whole” and analyzed the interactions of different parts to the “whole” (2). The concept of “system” was not used as a scientific term before the late 1940s and was applied until then to adaptive and non-adaptive systems (4).

Gregory Bateson, in the 1930s, researched a New Guinea tribe. According to Mead, his study, “was looking at relationships between the parts of the system in terms of how the behavior of one part evoked the behavior of the other” (as quoted in Miller 1980, 2). But at the time, there was no technical language to be used when describing such studies (2). Mead believed in the “general systems theory” and “systems approach,” which “treats life like a factory” (6). In this case, she claimed that such an approach assists “to embrace in our thinking the largest boundaries we can, which are the known universe—our galaxy, our solar system, and our planetary system” (6). Looking at the “whole,” according to Mead, means looking “at as many factors as possible” (7).

Mead argued that “anthropology is a discipline of the whole … the whole of man’s history, the whole of man’s culture, the whole of man’s being: and this approach can only be communicated by someone who is himself or herself wholly involved, immersed in it” (as quoted in Rubin 1979, 193). Mead was a pioneer and a novelist “in establishing links across disciplinary boundaries” (Rubin, 194). In her first works in Manus and Samoa, Mead criticized adversely the anthropological pursuit for the “tendency to neglect whole aspects of culture” and the failure to distinguish between cultural forms in different societies (as quoted in Rubin, 194). Mead advocated that “it is absolutely essential to study carefully all parts of a culture,” and that it is required to separate between “cultural forms in different societies” (as quoted in Rubin, 194). After learning about Mead’s approach towards her research, which has become a significant part of her philosophy of life, and after an in-depth reading of her autobiography, I recognized that to grasp her work, I would need to apply a theory that could treat her autobiography as a whole. I needed a system in which I could assess the relationships between the different components of her work while considering both her and her autobiography as an interacting, interconnected, and interrelated system. But it is not enough to select and apply a theory based on Mead’s views. It is also essential to have a proper understanding of her work as a genre. Even when considering Mead as a super interpreter of her own life and autobiography, reinterpreting her narrative *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* from a theoretical perspective is still needed.

## Mead’s Ethnographic Autobiography as a Case Study

Told in the words of Mead (1972), *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* is the narrative of Mead’s own life, and it is inseparable from the South Seas peoples she has studied through the years. In this book, Mead thanks all the people she met during fifty years of travel, and they have become part of shaping the life (her life) that she recorded in her autobiography. In the prologue, she states that she dedicated most of her life to studying other people’s lives so that Americans might better understand themselves. Mead wrote about her life “to throw what light it may on how children can be brought up so that parents and children, together, can weather the roughest seas” (1). Mary Catherine Bateson, Mead’s daughter, contributed an introduction to Mead’s published book *Coming of Age in Samoa* in which she writes that:

Mead wrote for Morrow the story of her own earlier years, Blackberry Winter, out of the conviction that her upbringing by highly progressive and intellectual parents had made her “ahead of her time,” so that looking at her experience would serve those born generations later. She never wrote in full of her later years. Still, she did publish a series of letters, written to friends, family, and colleagues over the course of fifty years of fieldwork, that bring the encounter with unfamiliar cultures closer to our own musings.” (Bateson 2001, xiii)

I believe that Mead’s personal life, education, academic career, research, relationships, culture, and history influenced the process and product of her ethnographic autobiography.

Mead’s autobiography offers data based on fieldwork accompanied by a reflective diary about her interactions with others. Stanley Brandes states that “ethnographic autobiography is one measure form of the life history,” and in this case Mead’s autobiography could be defined as ethnographic because she includes materials she recorded and edited as an anthropologist (Brandes 1979, 2). Oscar Lewis states that “condensation of life history material is carried out for artistic as well as scientific ends” (as quoted in Brandes 1979, 9). In her research, Mead exhaustively informs us about the many informants of non-Western cultures she had relations with during her different long stays, conducting research. Her informants were not literate or intellectual persons, and it is not possible to find reasons why the informants would take part in writing the autobiography.

While telling her story, Mead describes events in her life and simultaneously represents the context of her opinions, attitudes, learning, and lessons from these observations to ensure accurate recall. In her work, she includes reflections of prior teachings and experiences that aided her in establishing her own position. Mead uses external data to ensure that other possible or present perspectives exist that substantiate her subjectivity. That includes small talks or fragments of interviews, for example. While telling her story, Mead keeps analyzing the data she provides, thinking with the story, giving meaning to the experience, and offering a professional dimension to the research as a story. She steps back to think about what she tells us happened, providing insight and not simply a reflection.

In three hundred pages, divided into three parts, she covered only part of her life, from 1901 to 1978 chronologically. In part one she writes of her childhood and adolescent phase, while part two is about her travels as a professional and her fieldwork overseas. The last part of her story is about having a baby and being a grandmother.

Parts one and two are about a hundred pages long, while part three consists of about sixty pages. Her autobiography is about her earlier years, and although it was written 1972, the events took place mainly before 1945. Part one includes text, photos, and one drawing, mostly focused on her education in and out of schools; part two includes text, tables, photos, and one text in South Sea People language (Oceania); and part three includes text and photos.

Here we see Mead’s trajectory. *Blackberry Winter* is not a complete historical autobiography/narrative/discourse, but a well-written ethnographic document in which the narrator, who is the author, ethnographer, and anthropologist and at the same time the object of study and the subject affected by the narrative, uses the craft of sophisticated ethnography and narrating skills. This trajectory represents the events, the people, the interactions, the context, and everything near and far that Mead felt played a role in preparing her for her later mission, career, and purposeful life. Even her dying process was under her study in her last days and moments. It is the butterfly effect.

*Blackberry Winter* both directly and indirectly shows the social values that led Mead from her very beginnings as a first child, loved and wanted (Mead [1972] 1995, 19). These values are considered the attractors in her life and her autobiography. Plenty of interactions took place in Mead’s life, but according to her autobiography, most of these interactions were planned, maintained, invested in, and highly valued by Mead. In the course of her interactions, we see how she studied the person, the interaction, and her way of interpreting this interaction. The following example is from the chapter “On Being a Grandmother”:

When Biddy Barlow asked me, just before Catherine was married, “Whose side are you going to take?” I realized with a jolt that such a contingency had not occurred to me. So carefully had I restricted my daydreaming to what Barkev meant to Catherine that I had left myself out. It was an added delight, then, to discover that I enjoyed him very much. I appreciated and took great pleasure in his analytical mind, his keen enjoinment of all the concrete details of life, his sensitive regard for persons and lively respect for the nature of things. (Mead [1972] 1995, 273–274)

## Mead the Novelist

Michael Sinding (2010) writes that “the moderate view is that autobiographical conventions are shaped by conceptions of self and life influenced by socio-cultural conditions” (120). Cultural institutions such as family and schools and the rituals brought by everyday life practices influence individuals by imposing on them ideology (Althusser as quoted in Sinding, 120). However, Sinding argues that “writers can resist ideological formations by pushing or crossing genre boundaries” (Sinding 2010, 121). A genre classification is “a hegemonic phenomenon which restricts literary practice to approved, institutionalized forms of expression” (Elbaz as quoted in Sinding, 121).

*Blackberry Winter* is a representation of Mead’s determination to “practice personally what she believes vital to science and ethics-sharing and making knowledge public” (Dillon 1974, 490). Mead wrote the book *Small Conferences*, with Paul Byers, which promotes “the relation between the whole and the parts” and which has become Meads’ approach towards anthropology, focusing on analyzing the interconnectedness of phenomena (490). It is worth mentioning that “Mead spent her unchallenging high school days during World War I trying out her literary skills as a poet, a diarist, a letter writer, the beginner of a novel, a magazine editor, and creator of ‘short plays for school occasions’ ” (491). She was always interested in literature, and it is evident in her book *An Anthropologist at Work: Writings of Ruth Benedict* ([1959] 2011), which includes examples of the poetry she incorporated in her correspondence with colleagues Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir in the 1920s (491). The American Academy of Arts and Letters acknowledged the literary qualities of Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* and *Growing Up in New Guinea* as well(491). Nancy C. Lutkehaus (2008) writes that Mead “decided to double major in English and psychology, figuring the social sciences offered her more opportunity for success” (39). In a draft of her autobiography, Mead wrote, “I had no taste for failing gloriously or for spending my life trying to write the great American novel” (as quoted in Lutkehaus 2008, 39).

We know from Mead’s autobiography that she decided to destroy all her materials in 1945 after the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima. Possibly this was her own political revolt, perhaps reflecting her feelings that her country was not worthy of her work. She writes in her autobiography what she thinks about politics:

I do not advocate a philosophy of blind and naïve trust. Occasionally it is clear that a person in a position of power will, if he can, block or destroy something of great value. In such circumstances it is necessary to be politic; this means, essentially, using the strengths and weaknesses of other persons or groups for one’s own ends. In the same way, in wartime, a nation plays on the weaknesses—and even on the strengths—of the enemy. But there is always a price to pay later, an erosion of the capacity for trust, a kind of damage that persists after the war and makes the reestablishment of working relationships much more difficult. (Mead [1972] 1995, 131)

From Rhoda Metraux’s work on Mead, we learn that “when the atomic bomb burst over Hiroshima, she set aside an unfinished manuscript on the postwar world” (Metraux 1980, 265). Mead felt the world had changed: ‘We had entered a new age’ ” (as quoted in Metraux 1980, 265). Considering Mead’s efforts to change the American culture, it would be no surprise if she indeed chose a genre that had produced the most influential works and must-reads. The novel as a literary genre is a “powerful,” “compelling,” and “evocative” piece of work (Langness and Frank 1978, 20).

It would be natural after recognizing the knowledge of Mead in the field of system theory, her contribution to the development of the genres of life writing,[[21]](#footnote-22) to see that her ethnographic autobiography has novelistic features. This new approach leads to a new reading of this book. Mead writes in the last paragraphs of the book under study that she considers herself a member of the old generation, though earlier in the book she considers herself to be born ahead of her time. These telling remarks signal her astuteness, for she left interpretations of the postwar era to a new generation of researchers who would better capture the newborn reality. Presumably, Mead did not want to reveal a full showing of her life, though she was able; but she wanted to continue her anthropological work, providing interpretation and meaning to the segments of her life in her study that were under scrutiny.

## The Autoethnobiographic Novel *Blackberry Winter*

After Mead’s death, her daughter Mary Catherine Bateson wrote the essay “Continuities in Insight and Innovation: Toward a Biography of Margaret Mead” (1980), in which she speaks about the “network of fictive kin” (270). Bateson writes that “the kin and fictive-kin network constructed in New York City during the years when we had a joint household with the family of Lawrence K. Frank existed in a broader system of intellectual networks, for one of the most important of these also centered on the figure of L. K. Frank, starting with the Hanover conference in 1934” (273–274). Thinking back over her life, Mead also wrote about the fictive-kin network that surrounded her daughter and assisted in her child development:

Inevitably her arrival [speaking about the birth of her daughter] was accompanied by a good deal of excitement. I had so many friends, and so many of them came from circles in which children were a major preoccupation—educators, child analysts, and child psychologists. They all shared my delight in having a child. And so did my childless friends—Jane Belo, who had been so close to us in Bali and who had been with us in Kintamani when I lost a baby there, and Marie Eichelberger, who took Cathy as her special charge and became “Aunt Marie” forever. In England, Nora Barlow began to plan all over again for a Darwin-Bateson marriage as she visualized Cathy as a prospective bride for her grandson Jeremy, who was born four months earlier. (Mead [1972] 1995, 259-260)

In the summer months I had an opportunity to realize what it had been like to bring up a child in a household in which there were many willing hands ready to hold the baby and someone to do the endless chores and to sleep with the baby at night, so that the mother’s contacts with her child were both intense and relaxed. … In those first two summers the two households—ours and the Franks—were drawn close together by mutual interests and warm concern into a happy friendship. (Mead [1972] 1995, 268–269)

Interestingly, Mead speaks about a fictive kind of kinship when she reminisces over her college years at Barnard:

When we first began living together I invented a kinship system for the group. Deborah Kaplan, Léonie Adams, and I were the “parents,” and Viola Corrigan and Eleanor Pelham Kortheuer—who had an extraordinary gift for sensitive and humorous insights—were the “children.” In 1922 we added “grandchildren,” only one of whom, Louise Rosenblatt, has remained part of the group, and finally, in 1923, we added a “great-grandchild,” Hannah Kahn, whom we called David because of her resemblance to “the shepherd lad.” (Mead 1972, 106)

In her field research, we know that Mead studied the “early knowledge of kinship and village organization” (Tuzin and Schwarts 1980, 245). She published *Kinship in the Admiralty Islands,* and it was considered “an advanced contribution to the anthropology of kinship” (245). Donald F. Tuzin and Theodore Schwartz (1980) write that “it describes the generalized ideology of Manus kinship and marriage, revolving around the solidarity of siblings of opposite sex and their progenies, which comprised what she called the mix descent group” (245).

Mead assumed through her data on kinship that inheritance is patrilineal. She used the analytical term “clan,” which commonly refers to a unilineal descent group. In 1981–1982, the term was not relevant to any reference group in society. What Mead defines as clans are:

Groups in which both male and female links are claimed. Siblingship, rather than descent, is key. Cult membership and inheritance of the brag spirit, are not patrilineal at all, but are based on matrifiliation. In Arapesh, Iatmul or Tchambuli, patricians organized society. In Mundugumor … she had seen that descent and inheritance were not sex–bound. (Lipset 1985, 12)

And indeed, many societies construct kinship groupings, roles, and relationships. Mead was a witness during her fieldwork to such developing groups and networks and examined their function. But the descriptions that Mead provides in her autobiography about the kin networks are something she has created for herself; they do not belong to a studied culture but are found in her home, in America. Kin networks is an emergence. This kind of kinship was not the one she had studied but rather reimposed on her group of friends and family; it is her ethnographic imagination that is creative and artful, a product of her determination to transform her culture. She showed creativity by adding it to her autobiography, discussing it within the framework of home and ties. But all along she was trying to promote her theory. Bateson (1980) writes that “anthropologists seem rather rarely to bring cross-cultural perspective to their political and organizational lives, or indeed to their personal lives” (275). But Mead advocated for her kinship theory through her personal story about her family and how her daughter was brought up by a “clan” of close people. I am convinced that this is a clue of her incorporation of research into a subjective experience. She has replaced her fieldwork among South Sea people into a bigger macrocosm of the American culture. She portrays a fictive kinship in her autobiography that reflects aspects of the total novel. It results in layered and complex interpretations, such as this one. But fiction in Mead’s autobiography could be traced to more than one occasion and form.

## Chaos and Order in Mead’s Ethnographic Autobiography

It could be presumed from Mead’s autobiography that her life was chaotic. Already at the beginning of her autobiography, she writes about the challenges of growing up as a girl in America:

The prevailing cultural style, as it was expressed in stories, fascinated me in every smallest detail. I longed to live out every bit of it, But I also wanted to be very sure that I would always be recognized by myself …. [Father] called in our local physician, who said, “Look at those useless little hands! Never did a day's work in their life and never will! You'd maybe make a good mistress, but a poor wife. You'd better study nursing!” (Mead [1972] 1995, 20, 85)

Then Mead describes her experience as a pioneer in the field of anthropology. She took part in a new rising theory and joined “the Boasian school, and the theory of cultural relativism [that] was forged in the heat of many long theoretical battles in the discipline” (Hitchens 1994, 237). She writes about her relationships that never lasted long, being married three times to Luther Sheeleigh Cressman, Reo F. Fortune, and Gregory Bateson. She shared fieldwork with Fortune and Bateson, which was not simple: “The intensity of our discussion was heightened by the triangular situation. Gregory and I were falling in love, but this was kept under control while all three of us tried to translate the intensity of our feelings into better and more perceptive field work” (Mead [1972] 1995, 217). And she reminisces of the period during which she lived at the Museum of Natural History in New York City after her return from Samoa in 1926, calling it her “most permanent home for many years” (14, 16).

Chaos as well is evident in the research findings that Mead provides in her autobiography. She chooses to disguise the names of the individuals who took part in her research: “When I wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa* I carefully disguised all the names, sometimes using double disguises so that the actual individuals could never be identified” (Mead [1972] 1995, 154). However, her autobiography still includes many analytical phrases. Her narrative could be fragmented, possibly because of ethical issues, as she states she had to follow specific ethical standards in her other works. She “took a course in History as Past Ethics, to which [she] still refer[s],” and her training in psychology gave her “ideas about the use of samples, tests, and systematic inventories of behavior.” She also had some experience “of social case work” (99, 139).

The bricolage that she created includes some images of her family and pictures from the field. Fragments of her study are embedded in her autobiography, between sections in which she writes about her personal life that resulted in fusing scientific parts with literary parts. The final product seems to be incomplete and mainly represents “disorder, jumble, and confusion from certainty itself” (Townsend as quoted in Farsi 2017, 2). Mead goes through turbulence in her life, defined by James Gleick as “a mass of disorder at all scales … It is unstable” (as quoted in Farsi 2, 2017). Mead decides to stop all the work that she has done in 1945 (271).

What appears to be chaos, an accumulation of simultaneous events, small chats of many people and names of places, and a random aggregate of life events, has shown later to be the shaping and crystallizing of her personal life, career, and public life. And what was offered in the beginning as scattered sentences became a consolidated text and narrative during college and university and later becomes a definite life discourse of organized meaning and sense.

Mead had something to say. Her plan to change the American culture dominates her autobiography, transparent through the selected life experiences and research she chose to focus on and write about. Understanding her thinking and the order that resides only in her mind requires the critic to follow the idea that “within chaos there is order”; thus, this idea assists in investigating her case of an order within her quasi-chaotic autobiography (Farsi 2017, 1).

## Chaos and Order—*Bricolage*

*Chaos:* Mead’s bricolage seems disturbed when readers suddenly find scientific fragments in part two of her autobiography. Mead ([1972] 1995) includes a phrase in a foreign language on page 140 of her autobiography. She explains that this phrase and others were part of the training in linguistics that she acquired during her preparation for field expeditions: “training in linguistics had consisted of short demonstrations of extremely exotic languages in the course of which I was confronted, without previous preparation” (139). And although it is not directly said or suggested by Mead, I argue that this short demonstration of knowledge has nothing to do with Mead’s pursuit of education, but rather her desire to make a point that she was able to learn an exotic language and had the tools to study the way of life of “primitive” cultures. To understand the broadest meaning of such a piece of information, it is necessary to examine the context in which it is inserted and the history that comes with it. It is impossible to infer meaning by only looking at this phrase that Mead preserved in her college notebooks.

From this point on, it is evident that the bricolage assumes different properties that promote Mead’s anthropological research and evidence of her anthropological fieldwork. Photographs appear with the titles “In Vaitogi: In Samoan dress, with Fa’amotu,” “In Vaitogi: with Paulo,” and “With Pankiau, Bopau, and Tchokal” (Mead [1972] 1995, 148, 152, 173, respectively). And sometimes a photograph combines both her personal and career paths, such as “Above with Reo Fortune in Peri Village, Manus,” and “Left Reo Fortune with Ngasu” (170). Mead concludes the chapter “Manus: The Thought of Primitive Children” with a picture of her with Fortune and the title “Home from the field, 1929” (179). The bricolage turns to be a documentary tool, including letters from the field that, according to Mead, “bring back to life that distant scene” (153). This approach continues in the chapter “Arapesh and Mundugumor: Sex Roles in Culture,” in which Mead provides photographs with the titles “In Alitoa, Arapesh: with Mausi, Kule her father, and Nigimarib” and “In Alitoa, Arapesh: with Nemausi and her mother Wasimai” (198, 201). This shift from personal to all-encompassing bricolage results in tension and confusion when moving from part one to part two of Mead’s autobiography, from personal to research. It is demonstrated in the photographs that reflect the inconsistency in Mead’s autobiography, which entangles the autobiographical fabric of life with a study already published in other books that Mead authored across the years.

Mead provides on page 27 of her autobiography a picture of her with her mother, Emily Fogg Mead. The photograph was taken in 1905 and is included in the chapter “The Original Punk.” On page 233 of her autobiography is a photograph of Mead in a Balinese festival dress in Bajoeng Gede, Bali. The picture was taken in 1938 and is included in the chapter “Bali and Iatmul: A Quantum Leap.”

According to Nancy C. Lutkehaus (2008), when we look at the photograph of Mead with her mother, we see “in the clothes they wear, in Emily’s hairstyle, in the restrained, calm formality of the setting, an image of late Victorian middle-class American domesticity” (29). But Mead’s mother is nothing like the picture: “Whenever a question arose about how money was to be spent—should we buy a new rug or give the money to the fellowship fund of the American Association of University Women—my mother always tried to capture the money for the more worthy purpose” (Mead [1972] 1995, 25). She was not a traditional woman, as Mead describes:

Between the quotations of sheer delight, from Wordsworth and Browning, that came so readily to her lips, there were also the stern phrases of her American forebears and the impassioned declarations of early feminists, for example, about freeing women from the ignominy of being classified, along with criminals and imbeciles, as incapable of voting. (Mead [1972] 1995, 25)

She instead fits the label of the “New Woman” of the era (Lutkehaus 26, 2008). But Emily Mead “had no gift for play and very little for pleasure or comfort” (Mead [1972] 1995, 26).

Emily Mead’s reservation to present her true self in the photograph and rely more on the Victorian photographic convention reflects her awareness and obedience to social roles. She preferred to support social causes, such as women’s rights, and conduct her research, staying out of the limelight while doing so. As a child, Mead was influenced by her mother’s character, and like her mother, she took part in various roles. Still, she chose to be known publicly for her work. The fact that she includes different photographs from the field in her autobiography is a closing circle for her and her mother, moving away from a painful reality. Both pictures create a memory of the path they traveled together. And yet, the chaos that occurs when looking at these photographs within their context (Mead and her mother in part one, “The Original Punk”; and Mead in Bali in part two, “Bali and Iatmul: A Quantum Leap”) separate their connection and the intricacies they can bring when given a place next to each other. In this case, the effect is not achieved, and instead of providing a historical background to her account by constructing a bricolage that is about her life, Mead withdraws just like her mother to have her own say about her reality as a woman. She goes back to her comfort zone, providing photographs from the field instead of manifesting her revolution. I argue that because of their displacement in the bricolage that Mead created, her bricolage is a dimension—it constitutes the personal and professional (academic, research, etc) aspects of her life.

The chapter titled “Tchambuli: Sex and Temperament” includes a fourfold system that Mead, Fortune, and Bateson developed. They placed “the cultures that formed the basis of [their] discussions … in terms of the culturally defined temperamental expectations for men and women in each one. Those placed at opposite compass points, as it were, were complementary to each other” (Mead [1972] 1995, 218).

But this system is already elaborated on in her book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* ([1935] 2001), with a focus on the standardization of sex-temperament (chapter 17) and the deviant (chapter 18). Perhaps, Mead chose to include her early studies sketches as part of her professional bricolage and discuss it briefly in her autobiography because the topic was still very relevant to the American culture. It is said that the 1970s were about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. But it was notably the sex piece that had the most lasting and enlightening impact on those years and American society. Paula England (2010) writes that “we sometimes call the sweeping changes in the gender system since the 1960s a ‘revolution’ ” (149). But Mead perhaps saw this rebellion as inadequate and recognized that work still needed to be done. England concurs in her 2010 article and writes that there is still a “persistence of traditionally gendered patterns in heterosexual romantic, sexual, and marriage relationships” (150). Following England’s findings, it is no wonder that Mead used any medium available to bring awareness and promote her agenda, she was for example involved in a TV series (An American Family).

Although Mead specifically divided the parts of her table of contents to prepare the reader for a collaborative piece of work, nothing could have prepared the reader for part three of her autobiography, chapter 18, “On Having a Baby,” in which she entangles science with life documentation. Some scientific aspects in this chapter sneak up on the reader unknowingly, disguising Mead’s theories on child care as a natural motherly concern. Mead’s daughter recalls her mother once saying, “ ‘Cathy probably has the best documented childhood in the United States, and we’ve got to keep all these records together’ ” (as quoted in Bateson 1980, 272).

The bricolage that Mead ([1972] 1995) constructs based on her daughter’s life and her experience as a mother is not only full of memories and photographs such as “Catherine with her parents, 1940. Photography by Jane Belo,” it also includes poetry (253). Mead wrote a poem to her daughter in 1947, and it was the last poem she wrote. The poem appears on page 272 of Mead’s autobiography.

In this part of her autobiography, Mead ([1972] 1995) also provides several medical insights that dominate her culture, and she writes of her concern regarding this social path as a new mother. She enjoyed small talks with several health professionals and included these conversations in her bricolage. For example, she asked a young pediatrician to be present at the birth of her daughter and witness her experiment regarding a change in feeding schedule (248). But this request was a component of extensive research that Mead was working on, and she writes about it indirectly. She describes how Dr. Heaton asked the nurses to respect Mead’s decision to try other practices of feeding (rooming-in and self-demand feeding), which meant to alter the conventional routine (255). Mead recollects that a nursing sister in charge told her, “I understand we are to let you do just what you want” (257). This specific memory that Mead chooses to include in her bricolage is indeed deceitful. It is not incorporated in the chapters that elaborate on her work as an anthropologist. It is not a photograph, but it is a memory that intertwines her personal experience as a new mother with philosophy shaped by her work. This results in mayhem.

*Order:* Mead’s private bricolage is layered documentation of Mead’s personal life. Mead wrote an autobiography that includes ethnographic insights, using several tools she had at her disposal and in a way became a bricoleur that chooses their sources. She learned these skills at an early age when attending a private kindergarten:

The training of eye and hand, learning about color and form and pattern by sewing with bright wools, cutting and pasting, and stringing brightly colored beads made of different materials, and singing in time to rhythmic play—these were all activities that my grandmother and mother and father regarded as good for children. (Mead [1972] 1995, 71)

In part one, chapter three of her autobiography, titled “The Original Punk,” Mead writes about her early childhood. It provides information regarding the sources that she used: “Pictures of me as a baby show me in the arms of my mother or grandmother” and “out of my own earliest memories I could bring back the poetry that evoked these images” (19, 22). In the process of his creation, the bricoleur is also limited because he mediates his bricolage “through a historically situated state of development of human culture” (Johnson 2012, 364). Thus, a bricolage according to Claude Levi-Strauss, is an “instrumental se[t]” that enables the bricoleur to use it technically to create his own story. Still, it does not provide a meaning to the act of narration (as quoted in Johnson 2012, 362).

The bricolage that Mead ([1972] 1995) creates is based not only on photographs of her as a baby and a child, of her mother, father, sister, paternal grandparents, brother, and more, but also includes artwork such as a watercolor of her “Grandma with Elizabeth and Priscilla [Mead’s sisters] at the farm at Holicong” by Elizabeth Mead Steig (55). Mead includes a drawing in her autobiography that reflects her creative side as well as the unconventional thinking that she can use art to talk about her family and show how family relations can be assessed through art. Mead’s paternal grandmother, Martha Ramsay Mead, played an influential role in Mead’s life, and her opinions made an impact on her life as a woman and anthropologist:

She was conscious of the developmental differences between boys and girls and considered boys to be much more vulnerable and in need of patience from their teachers than were girls of the same age. This was part of the background of my learning the meaning of gender. … Grandma had no sense at all of ever having been handicapped by being a woman. I think she played a strong role among her brothers and sisters … After I left home I used to write long letters to Grandma, and later, when I went to Samoa, it was for Grandma that I tried to make clear what I was doing. (Mead [1972] 1995, 48, 54)

Mead’s grandmother’s central position and a firm stance in the drawing reflect how Mead saw her and treated her. The words become enhanced by complementing them with a drawing, and art has a significant place in Mead’s autobiography, as illustrated in the following quote:

Of course, I see a work of art also as part of the culture which produced the artist, and the more I know about the culture, the more meaningful a painting, a poem, or a novel becomes for me, until finally, knowing the culture, intellectually and schematically, takes something away from my perception of the single, individually created work. But the tie to my own personal experience—my knowledge of the day a poem was written or of the dream that preceded the poem, my memory of the room, the particular room in one of our many high-ceilinged houses, that Elizabeth is recreating in a painting—this always gives me a greater aesthetic delight. (Mead [1972] 1995, 69)

There is evidence that Mead’s paternal grandmother was also photographed on page 52 of Mead’s autobiography. These photographs are simply described by Mead as “Grandma” and “Grandma in 1918.”

Mead had a reason to include in her bricolage both documentative and artistic illustrations of her family. Nancy C. Lutkehaus writes that “along with her third husband, anthropologist Gregory Bateson, Mead was a pioneer in the use of film and photography in her ethnographic research. As the history of anthropology is intimately linked to the development of visual culture in the West, Mead symbolizes the important relationship between anthropology and visual media” (Lutkehaus 2008, 15). This creative approach is reflected in paintings and the written form as well. Mead describes her college experience at Barnard and notes how she and roommate Léonie Adams decided to decorate their door with lines from a poem in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s published book, *A Few Figs from Thistles*: “Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand: Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!” (Mead [1972] 1995, 106). She includes poems in part one, chapter 10, titled “Student Marriage and Graduate School.” The poem is titled “Rose Tree of Assisi” and was published in *The Measure*. It is considered by Mead as an early expression of how she accepted “a too easy felicity” (123).

I maintain that Mead's personal bricolage, the small collection of poems that she incorporated in her autobiography, portrays her private life better than the content of her autobiography, which excludes her intimate struggles. She saved these poems and used them to express her life developments. The poems provide a sense of comfort and order to the reader that *she*, an American legend,went through life struggles like any ordinary person. Mead includes a letter that describes the challenges that her supporters, such as Ruth Benedict and her mentor Boas, went through when seeking to include her as an anthropologist.

My dear Ruth:

Sapir had a long talk with me about Margaret Mead. You know that I myself am not very pleased with this idea of her going to the tropics for a long stay. It seems to my mind, however, and it has seemed to my mind ever since I prevented her going to the Tuamotu, that it would be much worse to put obstacles in her way that prevented her from doing a piece of work on which she had set her heart, than to let her run a certain amount of risk. . . . Of course, I know that Margaret is high strung and emotional, but I also believe that nothing would depress her more than inability on account of her physical makeup and her mental characteristics to do the work she wants to do. In my opinion an attempt to compel her now to give up the trip—and that is all Sapir has in mind—would be disastrous. (as quoted in Mead [1972] 1995, 129–130)

In 1925 Mead wrote another poem. It was composed after she finally received a seal of approval from her father and Boas to become an anthropologist. In “Of So Great Glee,” Mead expresses “the sense [she] had of being invulnerable as long as [she was] moving in the right direction” (Mead [1972] 1995, 131–132).

### What can we learn from Mead’s bricolage as a qualitative research method?

Though the research of bricolage from the perspective of complexity theory is immature, we can observe the reflection of complexity in Mead’s experimentation in her personal life and the work field. Mead’s bricolage is not a representation of a technical selection of materials but a deliberate action that serves the discourse, one that is a scientific work rather than literary, using bricoleur tools with creative and artful properties. The combination of each component in the bricolage, be it personal or professional, results in various emergences. The outcome of the trajectory could be translated into a qualitative transformation of her career as researcher, academic, and public figure.

## Chaos and Order—Think Description

*Chaos:*In Mead’s autobiography, there is no thick description added to the personal difficulties she goes through in her life. There is a recurrent pattern that involves her relationships with men, but each temporal goodbye or separation does not include any emotional discussion. When Mead was married to Luther and had to sail to Samoa, she writes only the following: “Then I set off for Samoa and Luther sailed for Europe” (Mead [1972] 1995, 134). When she writes about the reasons for their separation, she simply states that “Reo [her soon to be the second husband who she met while traveling] arrived from England, determined to make [her] change [her] mind” (163). About her marriage difficulties, she only writes, “but we had married with the expectation of having a common vacation working with people within the framework of the church. Now this was gone, and with it much of the sense of a shared purpose” (163). The following reasons were also provided in Mead’s autobiography:

But that autumn a gynecologist told me that I never would be able to have children. I had a tipped uterus, a condition that could not be corrected; if I attempted to have a child, I was told, I would always miscarry early. This changed the whole picture of the future. I had always expected to adjust my professional life to wifehood and motherhood. But if there was to be no motherhood, then a professional partnership of field work with Reo, who was actively interested in the problems I cared about, made more sense than cooperation with Luther in his career of teaching sociology. (Mead [1972] 1995, 164)

Mead does not shed light on her feelings of being given the news that, in her words, changed her future: “My picture of my own future was changing also” (164). The experience is not served emotionally, detailing the effect of her decision. Instead, it is reported in the sense of a checklist, what is right and what is wrong, considering the facts.

About her divorce, Mead writes, “I returned to New York to say good-bye to Luther. We spent a placid week together, unmarred by reproaches of feelings of guilt. At the end of it, he sailed for England to see the girl whom he later married and who became the mother of his daughter. I went to live with three college friends” (Mead [1972] 1995, 165). The same technique is used when writing about her marital challenges with Fortune:

When we arrived in New York in September, 1929, just before the bank failures that set off the Great Depression in the United States, … But Reo opened an account in the Bank of the United States, of which there was a branch at a street corner near us, and this was one of the first banks to fail. Reo was stunned. In New Zealand banks did not fail … Prices began to topple. The Museum called together the staff and reduced our salaries—mine was only $2,500 to start with—and for years afterward salaries stayed at the reduced level … So there was a kind of double pressure on our lives, for I set the pace, as far as writing up was concerned, for both of us (Mead [1972] 1995, 182-184).

Steven Stack in his work “Divorce and Suicide: A Time Series Analysis, 1933–1970” (the analysis does not incorporate the data before 1933 because it was incomplete) concludes that:

the analysis of the postwar era, which is a period marked by more typical and less extreme values of unemployment, supports the previous findings from cross-sectional case studies on divorce such as the ones from Chicago and Seattle. Herein the problems of the divorced population, such as increased social isolation and guilt feelings, are viewed as underlying the association between a rise in divorce and an increase in suicide. (Stack 1981, 86)

Mead writes, “that winter half an office found for Reo in the Department of Columbia, so he felt less imprisoned than he had felt when he worked at home” (Mead [1972] 1995, 192). But Mead does not elaborate on her marital struggles at the time and does not express her emotions. And perhaps this turned out to be one trigger among many that led to her divorce. This possibly could infer that she acted the same way in all her marriages. Cressman once said that Mead “greeted [him] without any enthusiasm … saying only that she had been talking and didn’t notice the ship had docked” in the summer of 1926 after returning from one of her travels (as quoted in Bowman-Kruhm 2003, 46).

Margaret Guminski Cleek, in her work, writes that there are “many interacting factors [that] are likely to contribute to a divorce,” among them communication problems (Cleek 1985, 179, 181). This could be understood from the following passage that Mead wrote in her autobiography about her marriage with Fortune:

These are the penalties of cross-national marriages, even without any of the complications that have been introduced by the changing roles of men and women. British-bred men expect to make the decisions that American-bred women expect to make—how the house is to be furnished, where to plant the roses on the terrace, and where to go on a holiday (Mead [1972] 1995, 182).

This explanation is concealed in the form of conflicts that such marriages present when arising from different family cultures and styles of daily life. This is Mead’s observation, but nothing points to a specific level of barriers that she herself faced during her marriage. This description is thinner than expected from an experienced master of interpretation such as Mead and sounds more like a commentary on cross-national marriages rather than Mead’s personal account of it. Generalizing on how cultures behave without studying them extensively is not something that characterizes Mead, who worked hard to describe cultural differences. In this instance, Mead’s comments could be the consequence of an ethical issue. Mead’s use of thick description works here according to the reduced form of thick description defined by Clifford Geertz. If we adapt Gilbert Ryle’s definition of thick description in its broader form, we can capture more of the whole of Mead’s personal account, which offers the action of all elements across time that led to emergent patterns in her later life (Hetherington 2013; Kaploun 2013). For example, from reading her letters we can gain more insight into how personal factors played a role and shaped her career and personal life.

Finally, her divorce from Fortune is depicted as follows: “In London, Reo had repudiated any psychological formulations. We were now divorced, and from England he had gone to China to teach” (Mead [1972] 1995, 222). According to Juho Härkönen, a divorce is an event:

That is, the decision to leave a partnership and the ending of the marriage. However, they are often preceded by a long process of ending the relationship, which can include estrangement from the spouse, stress, conflicts, and even violence (Amato, 2000), … and, as mentioned, the legal procedures dissolving the marriage may last well after both spouses consider the marriage ended. (Härkönen 2017, 304)

A divorce is a process in which the couple may experience different degrees of emotionality, unexpected changes, or crisis, and Mead does nothing to elaborate on her process of such an experience. This goes against the work of William H. Berman and Dennis C. Turk (1981), who write that “during the first year following a divorce, both men and women report low self-esteem, confusion concerning social and sexual roles, and feelings of anger, anxiety, ambivalence, and depression” (180).

In part two of her autobiography, in a chapter dedicated to Bali and Iatmul, Mead chooses to write about the end of her marriage with Bateson, again not disclosing any of her genuine emotions:

When I returned to Bali in 1957, the Balinese knew that none of our marriages, then such vivid partnerships in delight in Bali, had survived. They knew that Jane Belo had been very ill, and when I told them that her memory of Bali was unimpaired, they said seriously: “She left her soul in Bali, you know, for she failed to ask permission of the gods to depart.” Walter Spies died on a ship in which prisoners were being evacuated just before the Japanese occupation. My daughter has one of his rare and beautiful paintings on her wall. Colin McPhee died two weeks after the page proofs of his book and been corrected. Jane Belo before Traditional Balinese Culture was published, and Claire Holt in the midst of directing a new project on Indonesia. As I write Gregory is teaching, traveling with a selected group of students. (Mead [1972] 1995, 240)

Mead’s split from Bateson is included in a paragraph that takes the form of an obituary, perhaps to reflect how she felt about her separation or her feelings of sadness and grief. After reading secondary materials from a different perspective, it is possible to claim that the struggles between Mead and her life partners (co-workers at the same time) probably affected her personal life to a very critical point. And other types of relationships mentioned in her letters, but not in her autobiography, also had causal effects on her career and personal life. Cultural differences between her and her life partners, and even ideological ones, presumably played a role that could be seen only when taking all the interactions of these factors together during her life. From my perspective as a person who has lived and experienced the clash of cultures in my own life, I could address cultural differences as a significant contributor to this complex reality, which is not obvious from Mead’s linearly sounding thick description.

Mead ended part one of her autobiography by interweaving her love life with her work, trying to explain that they both demanded a lot of hard work, providing perhaps a preliminary explanation to her divorces:

Now, as then, it is necessary to survive all kinds of hazards—having the inoculations that make you feel clumsy and feverish (in 1971, I had five sets all in one day, and afterward crushed my finger in a door and bruised my knee getting out of a taxi); breaking your glasses; falling in love or having someone fall in love with you; trouble about passports and funds … Today, field equipment is sent off three or four months in advance and you wait at home … (Mead [1972] 1995, 134).

I argue that chaos, in this case, is brought up by the realization that Mead could apply thick description, as can be evident in the following order category, using it to discuss her experiences in the field. At the same time, it is apparent from her sentences from the beginning of her book that she was aware of some degree of unpredictability of her path. At the beginning of her book, she gives the story of a boat in a storm: “But even when a fishing canoe goes out there is a chance that it will upset on the dangerous reef and that someone will be drowned” (Mead [1972] 1995, 13). As a reader, in the beginning, I had the feeling of being on edge, waiting for something to happen. And when it did not, I was angry and felt deceived, expecting the complete story about Mead’s life and not the one being given, knowing that she had the skills and the tools to provide this sense of richness.

*Order:* Mead was trained in thick description but evidently applied it only when it concerned her ethnographic work; thus, the order that exists in her autobiography, in this case, relates to her research. The following description addresses the scenery in Samoa. The observation is beautifully, descriptively, and vividly written by Mead, and it results in the feeling of almost being there, illustrating the power of true details:

The pleasantest time of day here is at sunset. Then accompanied by some fifteen girls and little children I walk through the village to the end of Siufaga, where we stand on an iron bound point and watch the waves splash us in the face, while the sun goes down, over the sea and at the same time behind the cocoanut covered hills. Most of the adult population is going into the sea to bathe, clad in lavalavas with buckets for water borne along on shoulder poles. (Mead [1972] 1995, 153)

Mead uses the same technique of thick description in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and dedicates an entire chapter, titled“A Day in Samoa,” to it. She repeated the same use of creative words and descriptive language to illustrate the world that surrounded her; and she understood already, in 1928, that her readers would become better engaged with characters and story if she executed a perfect description:

The life of the day begins at dawn, or if the moon has shown until

daylight, the shouts of the young men may be heard before dawn from the hillside. Uneasy in the night, populous with ghosts, they shout lustily to one another as they hasten with their work. As the dawn begins to fall among the soft brown roofs and the slender palm trees stand out against a colourless, gleaming sea, lovers slip home from trysts beneath the palm trees or in the shadow of beached canoes that the light may find each sleeper in his appointed place. Cocks crow, negligently, and a shrill-voiced bird cries from the breadfruit trees. (Mead [1928] 2001, 12)

### What Can We Learn from Mead’s Thick Description as a Qualitative Research Method?

Regarding thick description, Mead adheres to the use of this qualitative method as an ethnographer, well trained by former teachers (interpreters) like Boas and Benedict. Though she is aware of complexity from external materials, she does not go beyond the boundaries of the discipline though she gives signals that further complex (analysis) is needed.

According to Annette N. Markham:

In fragmented narratives, power is more distributed: The piece can simultaneously make the author’s particular set of arguments and allow for alternatives by revealing the practices at work in the interpretive process. In the end, something important about the topic is learned, but the outcome is not completed, controlled, or predicted by the form (Markham 2005, 816).

## Chaos and Order—Narrative Identity, Identity Construction, and Identity Commitment

According to the *Oxford Lexico* dictionary, order is “the arrangement or disposition of people or things in relation to each other according to a particular sequence, pattern, or method,” while chaos is a condition or place of great “disorder or confusion.”[[22]](#footnote-23) But following the chaos theory, chaos is defined as a dynamical system that has a sensitive dependence on its initial conditions (Boeing 2016). Chaos could be also defined according to *Collins’s* dictionary as “the disordered formless matter supposed to have existed before the ordered universe.”[[23]](#footnote-24) The meaning of chaos goes beyond its traditional translation in the dictionary as: the nonlinear deterministic behavior of certain systems as the appearance of strange attractors of fractal structure in graphical representations of a systems evolution (Boeing 2016). All these definitions could be applied to the development of the narrative identity, the narrative, and the development of Mead as a writer, ethnographer, and autobiographer.

*Chaos:* Mead’s accounts of her upbringing provide meaning to her identity, but there are instances in which they are interrupted by mature thinking not characteristic to a child and hint at Mead’s research. For example, in one case in which she talks about her siblings, there is a slight inkling in her study of the adolescent girls of Samoa: “In thinking about all four of us, mulling over and over my own early memories and the family lore that grew up around each child, as it does in all articulate families, I continually tried to formulate my observations. The differences among the three girls could not be attributed to sex” (Mead [1972] 1995, 67).

There are several layers to Mead’s identity construction. The first one discussed here brings chaos into aspects of Mead’s independent work as a woman anthropologist, which are scattered all over her autobiography. She writes about the preparations before her travel, how she was trained by Boas, and the readings that she made such as Ruth Benedict’s “descriptions of the landscape, of how the Zuni looked” (Mead [1972] 1995, 137). In *Coming of Age in Samoa*, she provided her own arguments: “I described girls whose temperament—defined as an extra intensity of response—combined with their life situation and experience had made them deviants from the expected Samoan personality” (196). She writes in her autobiography how she “invented a cross-sectional method that can be used when one cannot stay many years in the field but wants to give a dynamic picture of how human beings develop” (154). In 1931, Mead declared that she “was to study the different ways in which cultures patterned the expected behavior of males and females,” and identified this as her problem to study within the research she was undertaking at the time (196). During the years 1934 and 1935, she:

Began work on a study of cooperation and competition among primitive peoples. This was a pioneering effort in collaborative work—the phrase ‘interdisciplinary research’ had not yet been invented—involving graduate students and younger fieldworkers who worked together with [Mead] to produce insights, based on research on thirteen primitive cultures, that might be used in work within [the American] culture. (222)

Mead justifies her work as an anthropologist and gives meaning to her work in her autobiography, showcasing identity commitment:

Scientists who are building a new discipline have to keep in mind the necessary next steps. In Boas’ case, there were two additional considerations: first, the materials on which the new science depended were fast vanishing, and forever. The last primitive peoples were being contacted, missionized, given new tools and new ideas. Their primitive cultures would soon become changed beyond recovery. … The time to do the work was now. (Mead [1972] 1995, 127)

Mead ([1972] 1995) also risked her life because of her commitment to her research: “The long climb into the mountains on slippery trails, sometimes up almost perpendicular cliffs and sometimes in riverbeds, was slow and difficult, particularly as I had to be carried, but there was no other way into the interior” (194). When she decided to study the Mundugumor, the only information Mead was able to gather was that they “liked buttons,” and the district government office had little intel on them as well (204). And yet, Mead wanted to meet with them. She later found out that:

They were a fierce group of cannibals who occupied the best high ground along the riverbank. They preyed on their miserable swamp-dwelling neighbors and carried off their women to swell the household of the leading men. … Instead of destroying villages, the village leaders were put in prison. So the two big men in Kenakatem, the village where we settled, had been imprisoned for a year, during which they sat wondering who had seduced each of their many wives. (Mead [1972] 1995, 204)

*Order:* Mead ([1972] 1995) does look for a meaning to her “self” in her autobiography. Her descriptions of her mother and grandmother could explain the paths that she has chosen to take in her life and relate to her high level of narrative competence. Her mother revolted against the advice of L. E. Holt, who “was an advocate of the kind of regimen, such as schedules for bottle-fed babies, that ever since has bedeviled … child rearing practices”; and her grandmother was a storyteller who “told [her] about poor people, unfortunate people, people who were better off, and no-count people who drank or gambled or deserted their wives and children” (25–26, 51). Mead, years later, selected anthropology as her career, writing and reporting about the lives of other cultures. When she had her baby, she decided to focus her research on rooming-in and self-demand feeding practices (115, 275). It is impossible to define her life choices as a coincidence without considering her mother and grandmother’s influence.

Mead's identity construction combines personal and social factors. In her autobiography, she emphasizes the power that her father had over her, even when she matured: “I simply was very careful not to put myself in a position in which he, who called the tune, had too much power over me” (Mead [1972] 1995*,* 39). Benedict, an American anthropologist who converted Mead to the field of anthropology, was “struggling with the problem of what to do with an eighteen-year-old girl who had been allowed to come to New York for the summer but was not allowed to go to the University of Wisconsin” (38). She once wrote a letter to Mead after a lunch with her father: “My congratulations, Margaret, I don’t see how you ever grew up!” (38). Mead was seeking to obtain personal approval for going to college and becoming an anthropologist from her father:

Initially, when Father decided that I was not to go to college, it was Mother who fought for me and invented the appealing idea of sending me to DePauw, which was his college, instead of to Wellesley. Two years later, when I developed a severe neuritis in my right arm, there seemed to be a good medical reason for keeping me home—which again fitted the state of Father’s finances—and I did not rebel. (Mead [1972] 1995, 37)

She also waited on Boas’s confirmation on what would be her research focus: “the choice of where I went to the field and what problem I would work on was not mine alone to make. The final decision rested with Boas, and he wanted me to study adolescence” (Mead [1972] 1995, 126).

These and other examples exhibit Mead’s reliance on men and confirm her traditional role within a patriarchal society. Mead did not condemn American society through her own experience as a woman. On the contrary, she re-entered this phase only when discussing her research findings, being vocal through other cultures, and appreciating and understanding that such an autobiographical accounting is easier for the reader to digest. Her only rebellion was in her mind, and she quickly moved on:

But I considered running away and taking a job as a cook. The endless stream of runaway wives and daughters who had staffed our kitchen through the years provided me with a model and, anyway, cooking was my only fully developed skill. But it turned out not to be a necessary move. (Mead [1972] 1995, 37)

The latter is evident through her career and research development. In her first travel to Samoa, she was assisted by a male: “Without the letter from the Surgeon General I do not know whether I would have been able to work as I wished” (Mead [1972] 1995, 147). Mead also married twice to men who were part of her field expeditions, confirming she was part of a bigger team:

On one occasion we were working at opposite ends of a house—I with the women gathered around a corpse and Reo with the men. Periodically canoe-loads of mourners arrived, ran the length of the house, and threw themselves lamenting on the corpse. The floor of the pile house trembled dangerously and the women implored me to leave; they feared that at any moment the house floor might collapse and we might all fall into the sea. I sent a note to Reo telling him what they proposed. He wrote back, “Stay where you are. They are probably up to something they don’t want you to see.” So I refused to go. Finally, the people, who had been thinking about my safety and were not up to anything, moved the mourning to another house in which I would be safe. (Mead [1972] 1995, 169, 171)

Gregory came over the afternoon Reo worked this out and marveled at our gaiety. … But that afternoon in Tchambuli we felt it was a triumph. As we talked over Tchambuli with Gregory, the central emphasis of Iatmul also began to emerge. Gregory was interested in what he later came to call ethos. (Mead [1972] 1995, 215)

Gradually we developed a style of recording in which I kept track of the main events while Gregory took both moving pictures and stills—we had no means of recording sound and had to rely on musical recordings made by others—and our youthful Balinese secretary Made Kaler kept a record in Balinese, which provided us with the vocabulary and a cross-check on my observations. We soon realized that notes made against time provided the only means by which the work of three people could be fitted together and which would enable us, later, to match the photographic records of a scene with the notes. For special events, such as trance, we used stopwatches. (Mead [1972] 1995, 231)

Mead did discuss struggles in her autobiography, but again, they were related to her research and not her life as a woman:

Malinowski had gone out of his way to tell everyone that my field trip to Samoa would come to nothing, that nine months was too short a time to accomplish any serious research, and that I probably would not even learn the language. Then, in 1930, when Growing Up in New Guinea was published, he inspired one of his students to write a review in which it was said that I had, of course, not understood the kinship system … I wrote my monography, Kinship in the Admiralty Islands, to demonstrate the full extent of my knowledge of the subject. (Mead [1972] 1995, 160)

The 1920s society expected married women to serve their men and families; and their rights, such as marital, legal, vocational, and reproductive, were limited (Showalter 1991, 107). It was a far-fetched dream for ambitious women writers such as Benedict or Mead to free themselves from the confines of their society when it came down to “traditional feminine experiences of romance, marriage, and motherhood” (106). It was indeed still early to fantasize about a life where women are able to maintain work and marriage when the man’s role was still unchanged (107). Women writers who wished to publish and gain personal achievements knew that if they did so under their own names, they would be excluded from “the canon of American literature, as it was anthologized, criticized, and taught,” and hence they sought other means to shine away from unjustified mockery to get serious critical consideration (107). The 1930s ended badly as well for women writers, as they “were increasingly marginalized” (125). It was a harsh reality for women writers as they had to suppress their desire to write about “the … intense mother-daughter bond, the conflicts of sexual desire and feminine respectability, and the power struggles of marriage . . . in favor of a more impersonal account[s]” (118). Jessie Redmon Fauser in *Plum Bun* (1929) “shows the steady subversion of female talent by myths of romance and domesticity.… Angela [a character in her book] fears that she will risk losing love and security if she appears strong or insists on putting her art first; to be beloved and feminine she must be ‘dependent, fragile . . . to the point of ineptitude.’ In marrying Anthony, she determines to make his happiness her career: ‘At the cost of every ambition which she had ever known she would make him happy’ ” (as quoted in Showalter 1991, 122). Nella Larsen in her novels explores the theme “of female sexuality and frustrated ambition” as well (Showalter 1991, 122).

Mead’s autobiography reflects the times and customs of her era, and these values influenced her writing. Mead’s narrative is true from her perspective and is not deliberately “irresponsible writing” (Neale 2017, 112), and the following description of her path to success points out her significant milestones:

Finally, the 25 years between 1953 and 1978 became a medley in which all of Margaret Mead’s talents and interests were intricately interrelated. They were her principal teaching years in the most diverse settings. They were the years during which she became a renowned public speaker with audiences the world over; the years during which she took part in high-level discussion and study groups …; the years during which she served on innumerable committees and commissions and held high office in scientific organizations; the years 1964–69, during which she finally became a full curator at the museum; the years during which she received most of the 27 honorary degrees she was granted, as well as many awards; one of the last was the Medal of Freedom given after her death by President Carter. (Metraux 1980, 266–267)

The following sections from her daughter’s memoir reflect the struggles that Mead endured as a woman on her track to success:

Through the years, the museum was invaluable as [Mead’s] base, but her own role was ambiguous as she remained apparently indefinitely as associate curator (she was finally made a curator in 1964), like so many women in academe who were not given the appropriate status. (Bateson [1984] 2001, 80)

Once in my childhood, Ray Birdwhistell [an American anthropologist] said to me: “your mother has such a masculine mind and your father such a feminine mind.” … in the fifties … a comment like that seemed to be a disparagement of Gregory [Bateson, Mead’s third husband]. (Bateson [1984] 2001, 142)

Bateson’s descriptions confirm the prevailing discriminative attitude towards women anthropologists during Mead’s time. After reading the statistics, we can understand better why Mead chose to focus on these difficulties rather than her marriages. It seems that the personal aspects of her life were not as significant as raising awareness regarding the lack of opportunity afforded to female anthropologists, especially in academies.

Three books discuss the position of women in anthropology: Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists in the Native American Southwest (Nancy J. Parezo, ed.), Women in Archaeology (Cheryl Claassen, ed.), and Equity Issues for Women in Archeology (Margaret C. Nelson, Sarah M. Nelson, and Alison Wylie, eds.). According to Deborah L. Nichols (1996), these volumes present “the extensive involvement of women in anthropology throughout its history—at least 1,600 women have worked in the Greater Southwest alone … —and the prominence achieved by a few women, such as Ruth Benedict, would seem to support the view of anthropology as an unusually hospitable discipline for women scholars” (405). Although women were given a place in ethnography, their roles were somewhat limited to “studying women, behind the scenes in museums, and in undergraduate and public education” (405). They were nicknamed “cultural housekeepers” due to their behind-the-scenes work at museums; they often worked unpaid and were offered little pay as research associates (406). By the 1930s, museums finally offered women better opportunities, but they still “remained underrepresented in senior administrative and curatorial positions” (406).

However, gender was not the only reason there was not a high rate of women working in the discipline. Cultural concepts of parenting and family responsibilities played a role in the advancement of women. These were considered as reasons why a woman chose not to enter the job market (Nichols 1996, 408). Men were able to have both careers and families parallelly. Still, a woman had difficulty, and it is argued that women were more likely to be restricted because of their husband’s jobs (408). In 1996, scholars mentioned that women in subdisciplines of anthropology “are the least likely to be married” (Bradley and Dahl as quoted in Nichols 1996, 408).

I can assume that gender and sex issues regarding Mead’s personal life were not a subject of research from her perspectives as an ethnographer. “In an early draft of *Blackberry Winter*, Mead wrote about her exploration of her own sexual identity and then thought better of it, excising those portions from the published version” (Lutkehaus 2008, 81).

The later accounts, such as her daughter’s memoir *With A Daughter’s Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead & Gregory Bateson* (originally published in 1984), are written from a contemporary perspective of the marginalized women and are essential correctives to Mead’s autobiography and can therefore be seen as a vital contribution to the documentation of her life. Memoirs and letters in this case offer Mead’s contribution to the development of American feminism and the changing status of women worldwide. From the perspective of complexity theory, this could be considered a butterfly effect, with elements of emergence and self-organization.

However, family narratives “may also produce altered explications of a life” (Neale 2017, 112). Contemporary feminist writers, such as Bateson, “often depict mothers as oppressed by the social constraints of their era” (112). As fragments of truth may be discovered after a considerable search, it is the misuse of data that could be unethical (113).

On the one hand, Mead accepted the social norms and the reality in which she lived, but on the other, she rejected it. The sections that speak of her independent work as a woman anthropologist make her autobiography less trustworthy and confusing. According to Heinz Lichtenstein in *The Dilemma of Human Identity*, “society depends on the stable identities of individuals. When the cultural storehouse of available roles fails to fit the identity themes of enough people, the mismatched persons may suffer identity crises, and the culture suffers from a catastrophic change” (as quoted in Gardiner 1981, 350). Mead attempts to avoid the “loss of identity” in the chapters that discuss her research work, and she maintains her gender role as an existential and moral imperative throughout her autobiography to escape the danger that might damage her reputation as a woman anthropologist (Gardiner 1981, 350).

Comparing Mead’s autobiography with her letters and her daughter’s memoir, we can see that Mead guarded the dichotomy of the personal and the public. This could be attributed to the fact that Mead belongs to the “old school” (older generation) as she tells us in her final chapter. Although Mead was avant-garde she respected the works of other ethnographers while setting a new platform for emergent change.

## Chaos and Order—Narrative Competence

Narrative is a vehicle for cultural transmission, in addition to its role as a device for communication and to recall and describe past experiences (Mafela 2013; Avraamidou and Osborne 2009). Its development begins very early during human development and continues later. Telling stories is a multi-componential competence requiring the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities.

Studies have shown that problems at the microstructure level of narrative competence probably caused problems at the macrostructure level when narrative competence was studied. While looking at the narrative competence of Mead as recounted in her autobiography, her initial conditions (prerequisites for proper development of narrative competence), were close to being ideal. The causal relationship between her early development of narrative competence and her later performance as a narrator is very clear and substantiated— even according to her.

*Order:* All components of narrative competence exist in *Blackberry Winter*. Mead’s ethnographic autobiography is a work of self-representation, memory, and ethnography. Using the autobiographical form, Mead can address the factors that became the bridge that brought her to where she is in her autobiographical story. The family, the institutions, and the community within which she was brought up and educated provide the reader with the needed context. Hertha D. Sweet Wong argues that within the autobiographical essay, “community is seen as a place (earth, land, reservation, neighborhood), people (relatives, clans, neighbors), and history as well, but more consistently as a place, a people, a history *lost*” (as quoted in Watanabe 2009, 45). Asami Watanabe writes that “autobiography, as creative nonfiction, suggests the importance that place and time have on the development of the author, because writers of autobiography re-interpret ‘self’ for others. Therefore, readers need to [know] what social, spatial, and locational contexts the self comes from” (Watanabe 2009, 47).

Mead grew up in America in an American family. She had three sisters, one died in infancy, and one brother. She grew up in an academic environment and “heard constant talk about university politics and financing, about the stratagems and ruses adopted by ambitious men, and about those who made their reputations by quoting, or almost quoting, without acknowledgment from the work of others” (Mead [1972] 1995, 31). Her mother, Emily Mead, attended the University of Chicago when she was young and was an influential figure in Mead’s life: “Mother believed strongly in the community, in knowing her neighbors and in treating servants as individuals with dignity and rights … Mother persuaded Father to send me to DePauw [college]” (86). Whesn Mead was a small child, her mother “studied Italian immigrant families in Hammonton, New Jersey, in preparation for a master’s degree in sociology; Margaret carried the study a step further in her own master’s thesis in psychology (1924)” (Metraux 1980, 263). Mead’s mother taught before she was born. She also introduced Mead to the practice of taking notes:

I was trying to invent something new—to adapt breast feeding to modern living conditions and to use a clock in a situation which the mother who constantly carried her baby had no need of a clock. And I introduced the idea of taking notes on the progress of breast feeding, so that I would know— and not retrospectively falsify, as it is so easy to do—what actually happened. My mother had expressed her love for me by taking voluminous notes on my development. And I myself had been watching and recording the behavior of children for many years. For me note-taking was, as it is, part of life. (Mead [1972] 1995, 261)

Her family “disapproved of any school that kept children chained to their desks, indoors, for long hours every day” (Mead [1972] 1995, 71). Mead’s grandmother inspired Mead tremendously: “My grandmother began school teaching quite young, at a time when it was still somewhat unusual for a girl to teach school” (46). She was her teacher until she went to Barnard. Mead’s father, Edward Mead, “was a professor at the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce of the University of Pennsylvania, and very early introduced his daughter to academia in all its complexity and narrow politics” (Metraux 1980, 263). The kindergarten that Mead attended was very progressive for her time, a private establishment that “was an expression of the most modern ideas about education” (Mead [1972] 1995, 71). Mead went to a high school in New Hope, Pennsylvania, continued her education at DePauw college, and later graduated from Barnard College, majoring in psychology. She was a full and active participant in the American culture and also well-skilled; she “reported on lectures given in a Lyceum series in the winter of 1915 for *The Intelligencer*”(81). During her college years, she filled her life with theatrical and literary events, taking the hours for a second major in psychology and writing short plays for school occasions(106, 109, 81). She studied Latin, French, and German in high school; she could write rapidly and learned to proofread, and later had lessons in Oceanic language(139, 119, 171). Her training in psychology gave her “ideas about the use of samples, tests, and systematic inventories of behavior,” and she also had some experience “of social case work” (139).

Mead describes the friendships that were formed during the three years of undergraduate study at Barnard College and includes a photograph that shows the historical change that occurred during the years, from the time when her mother was photographed in formal Victorian attire. Lutkehaus gives the following account:

To represent this period of her life in her autobiography, Mead included a photograph of herself seated outside on a bench along with two other Bernard classmates, the fledgling poet Le´onie Adams, and Eleanor Pelham Kortheuer. The caption for the photo reads: “Three Ash Can Cats.” The young women are similarly dressed in dark clothing, each coifed with a fashionable short, bobbed haircut, and each holding a balloon. Bobbed hair came to symbolize the flapper, a predominant and enduring female symbol of the 1920s in America. In contrast to the refined image of Victorian and prewar women with their corsets and bustles, petticoats and bloomers, long hair and long skirts, flappers were characterized as loud, fun-loving, fast-living young girls who had bobbed their hair, hiked their skirts up to their knees, rolled down their stockings, thrown away their boned corsets, and learned to dance the Charleston—a dance thought to be so physically vigorous and immoral that it was banned at some colleges. The high-spirited, flirtatious flapper acted like a daring, sometimes naughty, tomboy. (Lutkehaus 2008, 36–37)

Mead chose to emphasize the younger generation's rejection of values that prevailed in her culture, which was characterized in this picture. Fashion was part of her way to revolt and reflected her views. In her autobiography, she provides details regarding her status as a woman and her development as a female from childhood to adulthood. As a child, she describes how she was “being shut out of a male world” and “had to dress like a boy instead of as a frilly girl” (Mead [1972] 1995, 61). As a student, she reached a new stage:

But I thought then—as I do now—that if we are to have a world in which women work beside men, a world in which both men and women can contribute their best, women must learn to give up pandering to male sensitivities, something at which they succeeded so well as long as it was a woman’s primary role, as a wife, to keep her family intact or, as a mistress, to comfort her lover.(189)

Mead also refers to the influence that gender had on her educational and career path:

In the setting of this coeducational college it became perfectly clear both that bright girls could do better than bright boys and that they would suffer for it. This made me feel that coeducation was thoroughly unattractive. I neither wanted to do bad work in order to make myself attractive to boys nor did I want them to dislike me for doing good work. It seemed to me that it would be much simpler to go to a girl’s college where one could work as hard as one pleased. (99, 100)

Regarding self-representation, Mead has done a lot of work to reach this goal. She shined a spotlight on her life but problematized social and cultural norms and practices in light of her personal experience. She wrote about historical, cultural, political factors embodied in her subjectivity (Kim 2016, 123-124). Mead’s work holds “self and culture together, albeit not in equilibrium or statis” (Jones as quoted in Kim 2016, 123-124). Her personal narrative has emerged as the distinguishing method of social approach to personal relationships (Baxter as quoted in Kim 2016, 123-124).

*Chaos:*Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson theorize autobiography from the perspective of narrative theory and discuss the issue of the fragmented and provisional “I” that has multiple references that are neither stable nor unified (Smith and Watson 2010, 74). In her writing, Mead has demonstrated awareness of the tensions and contradictions in representing her “I” to various audiences, and she is aware of the boundary that exists between fictional and non-fictional forms in her narrative. In her autobiography, I can trace the retrospective manner of dialogue, which is more typical for contemporary autobiographies (as quoted in Smith and Watson 2016).

In her autobiography Mead includes photographs of herself in the traditional attire of the cultures she studied, which has confused readers. One example is found on page 149 of her autobiography. The photograph was taken in Vaitogi and shows Mead with Fa’amotu, her constant companion, clad in Samoan dress (Mead [1972] 1995, 148–149). When the cultural context changes, Mead’s external representation changes as well, and the reader is not sure how to exactly interpret Mead’s self in this instance.

Stuart Hannabuss (2000) provides in his work examples of different types of autobiographies and includes personal diaries, stories of elderly people reflecting on their past lives, stories from people recounting their workplace experiences, and even ethnographic research treated as a “whole.” Hannabuss stresses they can all look like a “narrative chain” of various events: decisions, actions, challenges, and achievements that invite the reader to be part of the experience, to immerse themself within the story of the researcher (100–101).

Part of being autobiographical, according to Hannabuss, is making “attempts at self-vindication or retrospective clarification, trying to make sense of the past, trying to justify past actions, or trying to make sense of where life went right or wrong” (Hannabuss 2000, 100). Mead as a grandmother reflects on the meaning of life: “This crowded month, during which I could be a full-time grandmother to Vanni, has rounded out my understanding of something for which I have pleaded all my life—that everyone needs to have access both to grandparents and grandchildren in order to be a full human being” (Mead [1972] 1995, 282). The autobiographical story should begin in perplexity and move to a “troubled and unsystematic awakening and culminating in a clear sense of purpose” (Hannabuss 2000, 100). It should describe “a physical journey” in which the narrator travels through “time and space,” trying to make sense out of all those revisited memories (Horsdal 2012, 88). Scholars have discussed the developmental process that a life story narrative embodies, and Marianne Horsdal (2012), describes it as a “journey of transformation” (88). But this turns out to be problematic for the ethnographic writer. First, the reader receives the author's experience, but this experience is entangled with other journeys. The result is that such an autobiography presents difficulty in differentiating the boundary between ethnographic research and autobiography (Hannabuss 2000, 103). Mead experienced challenges during her academic career and engaged in reflexivity to analyze herself:

By the time money was again available in the late 1940’s, each of the social sciences had gone its own way and social scientists—cultural and social anthropologists, social psychologists, and sociologists—were working in a kind of crazy tandem in which the traces had been cut. Where they attacked the same problems, each worked with different units and different conceptual schemes. I think I sensed that the great scheme was going to fail and that this was part of my depression. By the standard of depression, it was mild enough. It was, I think, somewhat like the depression many men experience in middle life when they realize that they are unlikely to go higher in their profession. (Mead [1972] 1995, 200-201)

The ethnographer is detached from their world when they step into the world of research, but then they become involved in some parts of their autobiography. In other words, Mead’s reflexivity on her process of growing up travels through various stages. For her, reflecting on her life also means “reflecting on [her] first major research achievement … there are powerful autobiographical elements there” (Hannabuss 2000, 105). In the chapter titled “The Pattern My Family Made for Me,” Mead writes the following:

By that time we knew something about the relationship between handedness and stuttering, and I persuaded Elizabeth to learn to use her left hand—and the stuttering stopped. But I wondered, as I always have wondered, what made the difference. Why did one child take the painfully enforced learning, which violated both her neurological makeup and her earlier leaning experiences, as a challenge she had to meet and transcend, while the other was simply hampered and impaired by her effort to confirm to an externally imposed standard? (Mead [1972] 1995, 67)

This personal reflection, at first sight, seems to be a simple observation elected to describe some of the hardships that Mead’s sisters had to go through in their society at the time, being both left-handed; in terms of the complete narrative, however, this statement is somewhat misleading because Mead carefully picked the story to prepare the ground to her research. The boundaries of self-reflection do not exist only within a personal context; they directly transcend to those of ethnographic research, as shown in the following passage:

How very difficult it was for Americans to sort out ideas of innate predispositions and culturally acquired behavior was evident in the contradictory responses to the book [Sex and Temperament, 1935]. Feminists hailed it as a demonstration that women did not “naturally” like children, and recommended that little girls should not be given dolls to play with. Reviewers accused me of not recognizing the existence of any sex differences. Fourteen years later, when I wrote Male and Female, a book in which I dealt carefully with cultural and temperamental differences as these were reflected in the lives of men and women and then discussed characteristics that seemed to be related to primary sex differences between men and women, I was accused of anti-feminism by women, of rampant feminism by men, and of denying the full beauty of the experience of being a woman by individuals of both sexes. (Mead [1972] 1995, 221–222)

Mead incorporates other perspectives into her autobiography, but these insights relate to the cultures that she studied. It could be suggested that within Mead’s personal context, the reader is provided with additional dimensions of setting through other cultures, perspectives, and Mead’s descriptions. The unique framework of her life is disturbed and interacts with different contexts of other cultures and other lives:

Through Mrs. Parkinson’s vivid tales, I could piece together the early social life of Europeans in the Territory as only someone could do who knew both Samoa and New Guinea. She explained to me, too, how the harsh penalty—death, in earlier times—for a Samoan titled girl who failed the virginity test at marriage had been fitted into the seemingly pliant and adaptable Samoan culture. I had never seen this ceremony and there had always been something about it that troubled me. Mrs. Parkinson told me that actually only those girls were killed who did not take the precaution of warning the old women that they were not virgins, so that the old women, the guardians of the title’s honor, could provide chicken blood for the occasion. (Mead [1972] 1995, 179)

This story reveals cultural, historical, gender, and age-related details. Mead interprets the girls' experience, and this merge creates “thick meaning for the reader … The reader is, thus, able to digest the essential elements of the findings, and can discern whether she or he would have come to the same interpretive conclusions as the report’s author” (Ponterotto 2006, 547). Thus, the reader becomes more aware of the “real experience” that Mead describes (Chamberlain and Thompson 1998, 3).

Horsdal (2012) writes about narrative competence and states that “narrative competence involves more than just a selection of the best fit among cultural configurations of meaning. Sometimes we have to construct and create new meaning in opposition to dominant beliefs” (65). Absence of narrative abilities can provide a sign that the work perhaps does not belong to the genre of “personal narrative” (Gatewood 1984, 8).

According to Muniruzzaman (2017), “intimate relationship plays very significant role in the overall life style of any human being” (abstract). In anthropology, intimacy is connected to “a process of rapport building that enables parties to confidently disclose previously hidden thoughts and feelings. Intimate conversations become the basis for ‘confidences’ (secret knowledge) that bind people together” (para. 1). Mead had a confidential relationship with the participants of her research:

The adolescent girls, and later the smaller girls whom I found I had also to study, came and filled my screen-room day after day and night after night. Later I borrowed a schoolhouse to give “examinations,” and under that heading I was able to give a few simple tests and interview each girl alone. … Gradually I built up a census of the whole village and worked out the background of each of the girls I was studying. (Mead [1972] 1995, 151)

Clifford Geertz (1989) writes how Mead studied “the erotic freedom of Samoan girls, the marital dominance of Tchambuli women, and the emotional inconstancy of Balinese mothers” and writes about them in her autobiography (339). But Mead omitted her intimate life from her autobiography. J. Edgar Bauer (2017) writes that Mead publicly spoke about “bisexuality as ‘a normal form of human behavior,’ ” but she never really spoke about her intimate relationship with Ruth Benedict and other women (1). It is possible that Mead chose not to cross the limits of the social norms and taboos of her time, being ethical in publicly writing about her life.

David M. Frost (2012) states that life stories that include interpersonal romantic relationships provide the readers “a sense of meaning regarding their relationships” (248). Mead’s narrative is nonlinear, but it does not achieve a balance with the “I” regarding her emotions, intimacy, erotic life, and romances because of its scientific goal. It is reduced to serve that goal, but she has never neglected the fact that aspects other than those were mentioned in *Blackberry Winter*. The fact that there were more writings that she did not include in *Blackberry Winter* support this claim.

By using different types of autobiographical time, other than chronological, Mead uses nonlinearity in her narrative to show the interplay of many factors, events, and persons sharing one space. In addition, this sum of interactions affected her character, life, values, choices, decisions, and fate.

Mead embraces the new scientific paradigm that became clear by the beginning of the twenty-first century, demonstrating her cutting edge nature (Bondarenko and Baskin 2017, 191). Dmitri Bondarenko and Ken Baskin write that:

Because networks are dynamic and interconnected, causality is systematic and non-linear. The world is ‘processual’—a ‘thick’ interpenetration of many flows on many levels of scale. … With constant change at every level of scale, agents throughout these networks must continually adapt. In doing so, unexpected events emerge throughout these networks. … These discoveries became the basis for the new, non-linear world view emerging today. … The world is no longer a collection of reified things. Rather it is a very nearly alive universal process composed of innumerable interconnected non-linear processes, which interpenetrate each other at many scales (192).

Bondarenko and Baskin claim that “the most interesting toolbox for understanding the non-linear world can be found in complexity theory” because “complexity theory [became] *the study of the patterns that emerge as non-linear, networked systems evolve*” (193).

## Chaos and Order—Aesthetic Value and Cognitive Value

“Aesthetics is making a comeback … whether or not this return is linked to the rise-and-rise of creativity, philosophy and cultural theory” (Harris 2014, 113). Mead was an innovator, upgrading some concepts and inventing new ones. And this innovation is reflected in her life story. In addition, she infiltrated art into her life and work. It was part of her bricolage. She used art to study some cultural phenomena. According to Salehi, “novelty and usefulness have become the most defining characteristics of accepted notions of creativity” (as quoted in Harris 2014, 114). Salehi also argues “that creativity has an ethical element because a new idea cannot have a negative connotation and be considered effective and relevant to the field” (as quoted in Harris 2014, 114). The same could be said about Mead’s writings in her autobiography.

*Chaos:* How can an ethnographic autobiography that includes scientific elements be aesthetic? The answer is the connection between aesthetic and cognitive value (Beardsley 1981, 243). And although the aesthetic value and cognitive value coexist, the first stimulates us to think and understand and the latter gives us knowledge and understanding. I claim that ethnographic autobiography plays a double role: it uses the interplay of cognitive and aesthetic value.

The relationship between the self, culture, and aesthetic value has also been proved. The self is constantly occupied in crystalizing its reality. It does this by acquiring knowledge via reading and inciting imagination, which in turn inspires new perspectives on different aspects of reality, creating a space of wholeness. The self does this across cultures. Thus, some claim that culture and the self correspond. In *Patterns of Culture* ([1934] 2005), Benedict explains that “a culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and actions” (46). Each culture according to Benedict chooses from “the great arc of human potentialities” only a few characteristics that become the top personality traits of persons living in that culture (xiv). “These traits comprise an interdependent constellation of ***aesthetics*** and values in each culture which together add up to the culture’s unique form or shape, its wholeness” (Benedict [1934] 2005). In the book’s foreword, Mead states that Benedict saw “human cultures as ‘personality writ large’ ” (as quoted in Benedict [1934] 2005, xii). To say this another way, what is said about a person can also be said about their culture. Mead’s self-awareness regarding other cultures evolved from Boas’s concept of cultural relativism and Benedict’s ideas on the essence of culture. When Mead describes different cultures in her autobiography, these explanations mirror her subjectivity, the self, while projecting her personal life.

The added cognitive value of Mead's research with the addition of the aesthetic character conveyed by her personal life story stimulates us to think, understand, compare, and reach a new conclusion and a new understanding.

*Order:* Whether pure aesthetic value can genuinely be found in Mead’s ethnographic autobiography and whether aesthetic value can appear alongside cognitive value is examined. A. O. Amoko (2001) defines aesthetic value “as a form of cultural or knowledge capital produced and disseminated within specific institutional contexts. The aesthetic refers to a particular sensibility or desire … incited and/or implanted through a process of formal academic training,” and it “describes the specific practices of reading and writing consecrated within the restricted confines of the ‘English university’ ” (20). Mead is considered a substitute for her culture; she was educated in English institutions and represented Western culture. She is influenced by her own culture, experiences, and personal life, which are traits of aesthetic value. Lutkehaus (2008) writes the following to describe the power that Mead’s heritage had on her: “Margaret was proud of her Yankee heritage—the Foggs, the Meads, and the Ramseys all traced their family lineages back to the Puritans and other early English immigrants to America—and she used her family background as her touchstone for understanding aspects of what she later called American ‘national character’ ” (29). Since the culture and institutions dictate the canon, the mix of art and science seasoned by a variable amount of aesthetic value determine canonicity and not the practice itself.

But what about art and aesthetics and the fact that Mead’s autobiography did not make it into the Western canon? Art is present in the everyday life of a subject. It originates there, but art does not have to be aesthetic unless it is associated with other attributes such as artistic expression, emotions, etc. Antonia Larrain and Andres Haye (2019) write that not every artistic production is a work of art, but art is part of everyday life. In *Blackberry Winter* ([1972] 1995), Mead “see[s] a work of art … as part of the culture which produced the artist” (69). Mead’s autobiography includes scientific (anthropological) insights regarding different cultures, but her autobiography did not make it into the canon because it is not the practice of art that leads to the canon. Still, the art is represented in the dominant culture of the canon; and in this case, the American Western canon determines whether Mead’s work is artful enough or not.

And yet, Mead, by her contribution, added the aesthetic value that stimulated our understanding of ourselves (the “new cloth”) while adopting the person and the culture as substitutes. At the same time, she added to our knowledge of our existence (the “old cloth”) as representative of her own culture. This is one of the reasons why Mead’s work should be canonical. But without such an analysis, it is difficult to reach this conclusion, and her autobiography is left mistreated for being overtly scientific.

## Chaos and Order—Ethnographic Fiction

According to Matt Jacobson and Soren C. Larsen, ethnographic fiction is a stand-alone genre “born out of the recognition that all cultural representations are crafted and in this sense fictional; they are partial truths structured by relationships of power and history.” An author “aims to evoke cultural experience and sense of place using literary techniques to craft conventional ethnographic materials—interviews, participant observation, fieldnotes, photographs—into a compelling story.” These fictions are based on facts that derive from research and events that happened in reality and “are told from a particular point of view, often with the narrator as a character in the story.” Such fiction is directed to intensify collaboration with readers and participants and “orient [the] creative activity toward political practice by democratizing the writing process” (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 180-181).

*Order:*According to Jenny Ingridsdotter and Kim Silow Kallenberg (2018), James Clifford noticed a problem within the ethnographic practice: “The understanding of the ethnographic research process in terms of ‘reading culture’ presupposes an objective view on reality as it is, and a standpoint where the researcher is positioned outside that reality. Clifford moved away from that understanding and suggested that, in the process of ethnographic knowledge production, the researcher not just *reads* a certain cultural context but *writes* it as well” (58–59). This is the so-called subjective depth that ethnographic research brings with it that opens the way for ethnographic fiction.

Mead uses fiction as a valuable tool in anthropology to make her academic work more creative and escape from its “objective” character (Sarukkai 1997, 1409). In the chapter “Tchambuli: Sex and Temperament,” Mead includes charts (two compasses) followed by a discussion of her research findings in a very objective manner, but then she writes how these results shed light on her behavior personally: “Both Gregory and I felt that we were, to some extent, deviants, each within our own culture … My own interest in children did not fit the stereotype of the American career woman or, for that matter, the stereotype of the possessive, managing American wife and mother” (Mead [1972] 1995, 219). Mead’s ethnographic interpretation to a significant degree makes sense and order in the chaos presented by the multiple voices, systems, characters, etc., in her work. Her overseas studies and their results applied to her narrative add to the meaning of her work; they also increase the understanding and reduce the confusion that occurs when reading her work.

*Chaos:* Mead thrived on understanding the American and English cultures. But she found it complex and moved on to fieldwork, taking a reductionistic approach when testing her hypotheses in a sample (small communities of Pacific origin). In her autobiography she expands on her interpretation, using her life to translate the evidence she gained from her experience overseas to shed the light on the American culture and others. But we should question the appropriateness of her use of evidence.

Mead realized the complexity in American and English cultures and made a valiant effort to make it digestible, comprehensible, and simpler to the reader while addressing a full range of audiences. Regarding the aesthetic value of the autobiography and how it relates to ethnographic fiction, taking into account characterization, believability, narrative movement, and scene-setting, I can say that Mead described her characters with a good degree of thick description, used the bricolage for believability, kept the narrative moving smoothly, and set the right scene (Jacobson and Larsen 2014, 184). Living in the era with a surge of ethnographic novels, characterized by reflexive and narrative styles, Mead differs from other authors of ethnographic realism; she is present in her text and she is active, not only on observation but also in participation and intervention (182). She was involved and affected as a system by the systems she interacted with. She was the initiator and innovator of the methods she used to explore the reality outside, and inside herself too. While crafting her narrative, Mead recognized and understood the significance of culture and history and produced an “ethical and genuine” piece (183).

Mead added character and plot to her life story, taking it toward the ethnographic fiction genre while retaining the sober facts about the communities she dealt with, making them more accessible to the general public everywhere (Langness and Frank 1978, 18). Mead made attempts to portray not only ethnographic facts but psychological aspects of the studied communities (as quoted in Langness and Frank 1978, 18–19). She studied and worked during the time anthropologists wrote a surprising amount of ethnographic fiction and as a reader was influenced by the novelistic writing in that period. It is no surprise she was criticized for the “so-called” overuse of ethnographic fiction (as quoted in Langness 1978, 19).

As L. L. Langness and Gelya Frank write:

How does the experience of an individual observer get converted to “facts” in standard monographs and to “fiction” in ethnographic novels? [So,] What are our standards of evidence for a description to be true or real? What, fundamentally, is the difference between an ethnography and a novel? And what are the codes and processes we readers use to construct for ourselves the cultural realities described in a monograph or novel? (Langness 1978, 18)

When treating Mead’s autobiography as a truthful account of her life, another concept arises that needs to be dealt with: the fusion of facts in ethnographic genres of life writing.

***Chaos:*** Mead’s research and her work as an individual encompass many more facts than her autobiography details. When she talks about her personal life, it is only marginally. Mead dedicated parts of her autobiography to her academic career. She dedicates part two of her autobiography to her field research in Samoa, Manus, Arapesh and Mundugumor, Tchambuli, Bali, Iatmul, and so forth. But the fusion of facts in ethnographic autobiography is fragments of facts, not complete research. This is problematic because the reader is not provided with the complete experience. They must turn to Mead’s other books, which are ethnographic in scope and less reader-friendly. The reader is not invited to contemplate on the gathered evidence or findings in these works. This imbalance could be linked to the merging of two genres, in which the author selects the number of details to include in their work.

*Order:* Mead’s autobiography ([1972] 1995) provides evidence that her work presents real experiences: “I had collected a great mass of materials, of which the most important were children’s drawings, 35,000 of them” (175). Discussing photographic material, Mead writes, “whereas we had planned to take 2,000 photographs, we took 25,000. It meant that the notes I took were similarly multiplied by a factor of ten, and when Made’s notes also were added in, the volume of our work was changed in tremendously significant ways” (234). Mead continues: “*Balinese Character*, our only joint book on Bali, involved looking sequentially at a large proportion of the 25,000 frames and selecting from these the key pictures, which Gregory enlarged and from which we chose some 759 for publication” (235). Mead also had recordings from her fieldwork:

Then, because of the density of the population and the richness of the ceremonial life, we were able to put together many new kinds of samples. We had not one birth feast but twenty; fifteen occasions, all carefully recorded, when the same little girls went into trance; six hundred small carved kitchen gods from one village to compare with five hundred another village; and one man’s paintings of forty of his dreams to place in the context of paintings by a hundred other artists. (Mead [1972] 1995, 235)

Mead remembers well Fortune’s struggle as an anthropologist having no evidence to publish and writing about the importance of visual ethnographic evidence:

Even though I had premonitions, after I finally heard how well my first book was doing, that life was going to be uncomfortable for Reo in a country in which I was at home and already well-known, but he was a stranger and had published, in England, a small specialized book that no one in America had read. His Dobuan work—not yet published, of course—would be his first anthropological book, and there was one terrible gap in his material. His camera had broken and was not repaired in time for him to use it. He had no photographs, and an anthropological book without photographs was almost unthinkable. What to do? (Mead [1972] 1995, 177)

The work of Suzanne Goopy and Anusha Kassan (2019) proposes a methodological approach—arts-based engagement ethnography (ABEE). They claim that traditional social sciences such as anthropology and psychology have difficulty when it comes to engaging with groups who have limited linguistic or cultural competency to take part in traditional methods like interviews or ethnographic observation. ABEE assists researchers who want to take a more active role with their participants to obtain “a deeper understanding of [their] social lives and cultural practices and the context and complexity of their experiences” (1). ABBE is “ ‘arts-based’ in that it asks participants to express ideas, perceptions, views, and experiences in ways through channels that go beyond the privileged use of denotative language characteristic of most traditional social science methodologies” (1). The method uses “imaginative and engaging techniques based on the use of a selected set of simple items to elicit and record participants’ creative responses to their experience, such as cameras, maps, journals, postcards, and sketchbooks, collectively referred to as *cultural probes”* (1–2). Mead ([1972] 1995) writes about the conventional methods that she applied in Samoa:

But in Samoa I was still under the influence of the psychology I had been taught, and I used case histories and tests that I invented, such as a picture-naming test, using pictures someone had sent me from a magazine story about Flaherty’s Moana of the South Seas, and a color-naming test, for which I painted the hundred little squares. (Mead [1972] 1995, 154)

But then, she writes how she collected cultural probes:

For the Arapesh, the Iatmul, and the Balinese, I have small but adequate collections of children’s drawings. In each case—stick figures among the Arapesh, stylized designs among the Iatmul, and, among the Balinese, vivid reproductions of shadow-play puppets, made by the boys, and human figures in a kind of confectionery, made by the girls—the style of children’s drawings was congruent with the adult style. But when I found the Manus children, far from seeing the world even in as slightly animated terms as their elders did, drew only the most careful representations of real things, I had to go on and on until, finally, I decided that 35,000 examples were enough. (Mead [1972] 1995, 177)

The artifacts that are produced, the cultural probes, still require according to Goopy and Kassan (2019) the additional ways that researchers engage with participants. To complete the ABEE research process, the researcher should rethink “the way in which [he] engage[s] with participants, which then informs the use of focus group and individual interviews” (2). Mead did use individual interviews:

The adolescent girls, and later the smaller girls whom I found I had also to study, came and filled my screen-room day after day and night after night. Later I borrowed a schoolhouse to give “examinations,” and under that heading I was able to give a few simple tests and interview each girl alone. Away from the dispensary I could wander freely about the village or go on fishing trips or stop at a house where a woman was weaving. Gradually I built up a census of the whole village and worked out the background of each of the girls I was studying. Incidentally, of course, I learned a great deal of ethnology, but I never had any political participation in village life. (Mead [1972] 1995, 151)

Dipti Desai (2002) writes that by “using photographs, drawings, and video as tools in qualitative research, art educators have broadened the boundaries of ethnography to include the visual as primary data, thereby focusing on the notion of visual ethnography” (307). Mead had artistic ambitions, and she understood and appreciated the value of art. Considering the statement of Hal Foster “artist as ethnographer,” one may assume aspects of Mead’s work to be artistic (as quoted in Desai 2002, 307). During the 1970s and 1980s, critical theory was linked to art and “the site for artistic practice encompassed “cultural debates,” a theoretical concept, social issues, a political problem, an institutional framework, a community or seasonal event, a historical condition, and even particular forms of desire” (Kwon as quoted in Desai 2002, 309). Showing how the “social, economic, political and historical conditions impacted the daily lives of people triggered a different way of working for some artists” (as quoted in Desai 2002, 309). Artists became “participant-observers in order to better understand the communities they chose to engage with,” and through the process of material-gathering from the lives of the people, they became, in a way, the ethnographer (Desai 2002, 309). Mead does follow the ethnographic methodology seriously, and it is evident from her autobiography; however, she also takes an artistic approach. She does not become an “insta” artist because she takes the role of the ethnographer. She does not attempt to deconstruct ethnography, and she maintains order (311).

It is possible that Mead felt the need to secure the findings of her research from future critics by pointing out the tremendous amount of evidence she had at disposal in her autobiography. One of these critics was Derek Freeman (1983) who criticized Mead’s Samoan research. His critique was very descriptive according to Paul Shankman:

Derek Freeman’s historical reconstruction of the alleged hoaxing of Margaret Mead in 1926 relied on three interviews with Fa’apua’a Fa’amu, Mead’s “principal informant,” who stated that she and another Samoan woman had innocently joked with Mead about their private lives. In turn, Freeman argued that Mead believed these jokes as the truth and that they were the basis for her interpretation of adolescent sex in Coming of Age in Samoa. (Shankman 2013, 51)

Freeman’s argument that Mead’s “view of Samoan sexual conduct was the result of a ‘prank’ or ‘hoax’ by Samoans has been the most damaging part of the Mead-Freeman controversy for Mead’s reputation” (Shankman 2013, 51). Freeman published his findings in the *American Anthropologist* in 1989, and the report resulted in an evaluation of Mead’s fieldwork competency as well. Paul Shankman writes that “she was not simply a victim of a Samoan prank but also the victim of her limited experience in the field, her lack of knowledge of Samoan custom, and her prior beliefs about the role of culture in human behavior” (52). Freeman then published his book *The Fateful Hoaxing of Margaret Mead: A Historical Analysis of Her Samoan Research* in 1999, in which he asked for a “revision of Western intellectual history due to the significance of the hoaxing” (52). Freeman relied on Fa’apua’a and Fofoa as the primary informants of Mead’s study. But this evidence turned out to be false, because “an analysis of Mead’s published work on Samoa and her field materials demonstrates that Fa’apua’a was not a primary informant for Mead nor was she an informant on adolescent sex” (52).

Melvin Ember (1985) believes we should be questioning Freeman’s critique, because “his evidence does not deal with the time and place that Mead described. In addition, he did not employ any systematic data-collection methods that are designed to minimize or eliminate the possibility that the investigator’s biases will influence his or her observations” (906). He also emphasizes the fact that Freeman’s evidence might have been a factor had Samoa remained intact, meaning had there not been any change in the social and cultural behavior (907). Freeman’s evidence is based on “hearsay,” and Ember argues that people cannot know what happened in another time or place in their society (907). Ember writes about the topic of evidence and how it is considered scientific. He claims that “the reader is obliged to be skeptical—obliged because until [the researcher] present[s] supporting evidence [the reader] *should* be skeptical. That’s the way of science” (906). He states that words don’t have much power when it comes to providing evidence in ethnographic research and that other methods of collecting evidence in science were invented to dispose of biases that could influence the researcher and his or her observations (907). Mead writes about all the scientific evidence she gathered and where it could be found; in this sense, she created a device to protect her and her research:

In the new Hall of the Peoples of the Pacific at the American Museum of Natural History, there is an exhibit based on the collection of 1,300 Balinese carvings analyzed by Claire Holt on cards, using a method that predated computer analysis. But the material remains unworked up, as she left it to write her great work on Indonesian art. We have made other attempts to reproduce some of the conditions of the Balinese research. The big research project, Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures, which was started almost immediately after the war under Ruth Benedict’s direction, was one of these. In this project we worked in small overlapping groups, whose members differed widely in background and experience and who were trained in a variety of disciplines—scientists, artists, and students of the arts. In each of the nine cultures we studied at distance, we worked with informants and used films, novels, autobiographies, artistic production, records of congresses, manuals of child care and other didactic literature, and many other kinds of materials available in complex modern societies. (Mead [1972] 1995, 239–240)

The matter needs to be considered from a new perspective dictated by the interaction between the author and the text and the text and the reader (Sadowski 2000, 85). For the reader of Mead’s autobiography, trust is built upon the way Mead provided the evidence, the documents she used and described, and the methods she exercised. It is a dynamic process according to Sadowski (84).

## Chaos and Order—Hybridity and Intertextuality

*Chaos:* If we want to consider *Blackberry Winter* as an autobiography per se, we can presume we are reading a hybrid genre. Mead combines the academic discipline in which she established her reputation as a leading anthropologist with an account of her life. Her autobiography intermixes autobiographical properties, diaries,[[24]](#footnote-25) letters, novelistic features, and ethnographic-scientific content such as field notes, reports, recordings of materials like field pictures, poetry, artistic texts, and non-artistic productions of works. Containing all these features, *Blackberry Winter* tumbles somewhere between the range of ethnographic autobiography, autobiography, historical autobiography, novel, ethnographic novel, and ethnographic imagination. It blurs the boundaries.

Applying what is known about memoirs, *Blackberry Winter* shares with the genre of memoir a great degree of resemblance. Heather Richardson (2017) writes that memoir is not only about writing one’s past. Although it is expected that the author will map personal memories, revisit them in an older stage in life, enquire and reveal major events, “dig down to episodes [that he or she] really remembered—not the anecdotes, or other people’s versions,” there is another characteristic to memoir writing (161–162, 164). There also must be “a connecting thread, a through-line” (162). Mead as a child and Mead as an adult are connected. For example, her family provided the backdrop that led her to what she has become.

Bernd Neumann’s 1971 theory of autobiography, *Identität und Rollenzwang [Identity and Social Roles]*, differs autobiography from memoir. Autobiography “centers on the psychic and personal development of the individual, memoirs devote more attention to ‘exterior states’ ” (as quoted in Lahusen 2019, 626). These “exterior states” include “public life” (Lahusen 2019, 626). Francis Russell Hart defines a memoir as:

A depiction of an individual’s life, or a ‘memorable’ part of it, within which the era in question and the effect an individual has had on a historically important political or public event is brought to the fore. … memoir is distinct from autobiography in that it characteristically involves inserting an individual life story into a larger context of public or historic consequence; it focuses on participation by an individual, most commonly a public personality, in public life, in public events, not on the reconstruction of an individual’s developmental history. … Memoirs principally deal with “an event, an era, an institution, a class identity” (as quoted in Lahusen 2019, 626).

Mead makes it clear to the reader in the first part of her book that she used notebooks and diaries from her childhood and from her mother to construct the details of her early life (Mead [1972] 1995, 19, 64). We are reading a text that belongs to an autobiography that is also ethnographic, novelistic, and memoir; therein lies the confusion.

Mead’s work also has characteristics that relate to the genre of travelogue[[25]](#footnote-26) because it includes many experiences from her travels. “Travel literature is a collective term for representations of actual or fictional travels” (Holdenried 2019, 675). Travelogues are not only “guidebooks with useful information for travellers” or “pilgrimage guides,” they include also “literary travel accounts, travel stories and novels” (675). Michaela Holdenried writes that “hybrid extensions into the literary realm are common,” and “autobiographies are related genr[e]” (675). Mead is applying “the eye-witness element [that] is an indispensable part of the travelogue (eventually morphing into personal experience,” when she writes in her autobiography of her encounters with foreign cultures (676).

But the question of whether Mead’s autobiography is to be considered as loosely more immediate or less mediated, thus mirroring the more formal autobiography, requires the use of complexity theory applied to the text. Geertz (1980), the father of thick description, believed that:

The properties connecting texts with one another, that put them, ontologically anyway, on the same level, are coming to seem as important in characterizing them as those dividing them; and rather than face an array of natural kinds, fixed types divided by sharp qualitative differences, we more and more see ourselves surrounded by a vast, almost continuous field of variously intended and diversely constructed works we can order only practically, relationally, and as our purposes prompt us. (166)

In his article “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” Geertz speaks about “the theory of meaning [as] implied by … multiple contextualization of cultural phenomena … [it] exists … [as] a catalogue of wavering intimations and half-joined ideas” (177). In her work, Mead takes the role of the “new philologist” described by Geertz as “a specialist in contextual relations—in all areas of knowledge in which text-building . . . is a central activity” (177). Alton Becker describes four orders of connection in a text for the new philologist to investigate: “the relation of its parts to one another; the relation of it to others culturally or historically associated with it; the relation of it to those who in some sense construct it; and the relation of it to realities conceived as lying outside of it” (as quoted in Geertz 1980, 177). This could be captured as a typical complex entity that needs to be analyzed by complexity theory.

I can also recognize different types of intertextualities in Mead’s autobiography according to the classification offered by scholars. First, Asma Muhammad Al-Zarikat and Nizar Abdullah Damour provide the conventional definition of intertextuality:

The text is related in some way to previous and contemporary texts … since it is not possible to find a text out of thin air, and every text must be included, and overlap with other previous texts; this means that intertextuality theory will not be afflicted with old and impotence, and it remains renewable and generous as long as there is a birth of new texts. (Al-Zarikat and Damour 2020, 93)

Mead and her colleagues benefited from previous works written by other anthropologists, and she interacts with these past texts and ideas; they provided her with input into the present:

Edward Sapir and A. A. Goldenweiser argued about Jung’s recently published theory of psychological types. Erna Gunther, who had made an avant-garde “contract marriage” with Leslie Spier, had her young son with her. Diamond Jenness discussed the work he was beginning in the Arctic.

T. F. Mcllwraith talked about his work with the Bella Bella, whom he had had to help reconstruct old ceremonies so that he could study them. Everyone there had a field of his own, each had a “people” to whom he referred in his discussions. (Mead [1972] 1995, 124)

Mead follows this pattern and addresses her “own people” and the works that inspired and influenced her. She refers to Professor Boas’s academic work:

He had reached one of those watersheds that occur in the lives of statesmen-scientists who are mapping out the whole course of a discipline. He felt that sufficient work had gone into demonstrating that peoples borrowed from one another, that no society evolved in isolation, but was continually influenced in its development by other peoples, other cultures, and other, differing, levels of technology. He decided that the time had come to tackle the set of problems that linked the development of individuals to what was distinctive in the culture in which they were reared. (Mead [1972] 1995, 126)

Mead also refers to Ruth Benedict’s research:

Our thinking owed a great deal to Ruth Benedict’s formulation of the great arc of personality potential from which each culture selected, so to speak, only certain human traits to emphasize. While we were on the Sepik, we had the manuscript of Patterns of Culture, a draft of which she had sent us. But Ruth Benedict used the term “arc” as a figure of speech and she did not think of different culturally patterned types of personality as systematically related to one another. In my own thinking I drew on the work of Jung, especially his fourfold scheme for grouping human beings as psychological types, each related to the others in a complementary way. Gregory, who tended to use biological analogues, invoked the formal patterns of Mendelian inheritance. (Mead [1972] 1995, 217)

I had, of course, shared Ruth Benedict’s earlier discoveries of the ways in which different cultures selectively emphasize certain human potentialities and disallow others. (Mead [1972] 1995, 195)

Thus, intertextuality in Mead’s case best fits Ahmad Al-Zoubi definition:

That a literary text includes other texts or ideas, preceding it by quoting, embedding, hinting or indicating, or similar cultural reading of the writer, so that these texts or ideas merge with the original text to form one whole new text. (as quoted in Al-Zarikat and Damour 2020, 94)

According to Julia Kristeva “intertextuality refers not only to the ability of one text to pass into others, but also to ‘the ability . . . to exchange and permutate them’ ” (as quoted in Mageo 2002, 418). And indeed, the above-described examples involve this type of intertextuality.

The second type of intertextuality has to do with Mead being a student and researcher at American institutes. As a student, these academic institutions

influenced Mead. But when Mead stepped into adult life and traveled to do her research, she became an influencer. In her autobiography, Mead describes new methods and tells that she invented them with her team or independently:

Before I started out for Samoa I was warned that the terms in which others had written about the culture were anything but fresh and uncontaminated. The recorded grammar was contaminated by the ideas of Indo-European grammar and the descriptions of local chiefs by European notions about rank and status. I knew I would have to thread my way. (Mead [1972] 1995, 144)

I had invented a new kind of field work. (Mead [1972] 1995, 199–200)

The type of intertextuality here is two-fold. As a student, Mead maintained the dominance of canonical works and methods, but as a researcher, she was an influencer and introduced “diverse texts and worldviews into the English curriculum,” which required a new intertextual network for teachers and students (Truman, Davies, and Buzacott 2021, 11). In a way, Mead disturbs the traditional use of intertextuality. She not only follows the footsteps of other canonical works, but she also provides as a researcher her contribution, another layer, which is fresh.

Mead includes and excludes ideas, texts, and citations that serve her agenda. She writes about Fortune’s published article in *Oceania* titled “A Note on Cross-Cousin Marriage” and Bateson’s published book *Naven* (Mead [1972] 1995, 215, 227). But she does not elaborate on Rhoda Metraux's work. She mentions Metraux in her autobiography only twice. On page 4 she writes, “ and, finally, in New York, where I shared with Rhoda Metraux, who had just returned from field work on the Sepik River, this overview of my own field work that now extends back almost fifty years”; and towards the end of the autobiography on page 239: “Rhoda Metraux has gone back to Iatmul to add music and sound and her own complex perceptions to the work that Gregory and I did.” We do learn more later from different sources, such as her letters published in *To Cherish the Life of the World: Selected Letters of Margaret Mead,* an edited collection by Margaret M. Caffrey and Patricia A. Francis published in 2006, and in *With A Daughter’s Eye: A Memoir of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson* (1984) by her daughter Mary Catherine Bateson. This is an example where Mead did not want to reference Metraux, only mention her. Thus, this is not intertextuality.

The third type of intertextuality relates to Stephen A. Tyler’s opening statement in his essay “Ethnography, Intertextuality and the End of Description.”

What could be less intertextual than an ethnography, that factual description of culture and mirror of social reality? What mirage of other texts does it evoke, what prior text transform? Its representation of native life gives the appearance of a direct confrontation of mind *and* nature, word and thing, subject and object, of clear referential meaning. (Tyler 1985, 83).

Tyler explains that ethnography is a description or an account, but not of texts; it is an account of other people, and it includes the part of the witness, the experience of the observer, which transcribes the witness experience to the practice of writing this ethnography. In a way, the culture of the other penetrates the ethnographer’s way of life. The cultural life of the other is another dimension, another way of life, that the ethnographer sees and reports on. I would like to name it “cultural intertextuality,” since one culture, that of the ethnographer’s, is influenced by another.

Mead includes in her autobiography many findings from different fieldwork experiences, observations that she reports on, such as this one:

The little girls were as bright and competent as their mothers. Tchambuli is the only culture in which I have worked in which the small boys were not the most upcoming members of the community, with the most curiosity and the freest expression of intelligence. (Mead [1972] 1995, 214)

This leads to an emergent body not of texts, but of cultures. Mead begins with her own native American culture, describing her upbringing and studies as an insider. In Part Two of her autobiography, she moves as an outsider to report on Samoa, Manus, Arapesh and Mundugumor, Bali, and Iatmul. Sometimes, she even entangles her own culture with reportage on the cultures she studied: “among the Tachambuli the expected relations between men and women reversed those that are characteristic of our own culture” (Mead [1972] 1995, 214). In some parts of her descriptions, she provides merely facts, an objective voice as an ethnographer, such as here:

In Arapesh, both men and women were expected to be succoring and cherishing and equally concerned with the growth of children. (Mead [1972] 1995, 197)

But this act is exactly what exposes ethnography’s intertextuality, “for it indexes an orientation to an ideology defined in other texts. The desire for objective description grounds ethnography intertextually within the discourse of science” (Tyler 1985, 84).

Mead also sticks to genre conventions. She uses thick description, key concepts in ethnography such as “kinship system,” “field work,” “social settings” (Mead [1972] 1995, 193, 192, 189), and many more. According to Tyler (1985), key concepts are used as “indexical particulars,” and ethnographers apply them, thinking that the knowledgeable reader will understand them from reading previous works by other ethnographers. Thus, such a presumption leads to “an intertextual practice that constitutes an imagined community of discourse, a fictitious group of engaged and knowledgeable readers” (86).

Mead includes in her work names of authors and descriptions of their works that were well known in her discipline (Tyler 1985, 84):

Recently, working from a quite different base, Clifford and Hilred Geertz have done beautiful work on Bali. (Mead [1972] 1995, 239)

Ruth’s letters had roused my curiosity, and at Adelaide, Reo and I went ashore, found the University library, and read the article on anthropology that Malinowski had contributed to the latest supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britanica. (Mead [1972] 1995, 159)

Tyler explains that “constellations of key concepts and invocations of strong authors comprise the commonplaces that pass for theory and method in the community of discourse called anthropology. Every ethnography is organized around or by means of these commonplaces, for they serve as loci for arguments, as frameworks for organizing and interpreting facts, and as orientations for observation” (86). Ethnographic intertextuality is also evoked when the ethnographer translates and comments on the text of the studied culture. The translation of the text means “separating language from [its] culture” (89).

Mead provides in her works several examples of foreign phrases with translations: “When Bonyalo, who was unbelievably dense, could not explain what mwelmwel was—it was, in fact a whole expensive array of bridal finery made of shell money and dog teeth . . .” ; and, “In 1953, the smallest boys, when they met me, used to chant, “Aua nat e jo um e jo lau we?”—you little boys of mine, where is my house? This was a phrase I had once used to them, perhaps with a special emphasis” (Mead [1972] 1995, 171, 175). The idea of translation according to Tyler (1985) is “based on the notion of making the meanings of one way of life comprehensible to the language of another” (89). The ethnographer “speak[s] for the native” through translation, dominating the native language so it would “fit the civilized contours of our own discourse” (90).

Tyler speaks of “The arrival scene,” which records the ethnographer’s first experience with the natives, a personal narrative based on the ethnographer’s authority (Tyler 1985, 90). Mead describes such an experience in her autobiography:

Finally the boat arrived again. And now, with the help of the mother of the half-Samoan children I had met in Honolulu, I was able to move to a village. She arranged for me to spend ten days in Vaitogi and to live in the household of a chief who enjoyed entertaining visitors. … It was a beautiful village with its swept plaza and tall, round, thatched guesthouses against the pillars of which the chiefs sat on formal occasions. (Mead [1972] 1995, 149–150)

But this form was already conveyed in travel literature by the sixteenth century, and it was only borrowed by ethnographers (Tyler 1985, 90). But while travel narrative is about the personal experience, ethnography “represse[s] personal narrative, relegating it to the functions of ‘setting the scene’ and establishing the author’s authority by means of his ‘presence’ ” (Pratt as quoted in Tyler, 90). I already mentioned the “anxiety of influence,” which could be traced in the above-given examples within the framework of ethnographic intertextuality.

Another concept relates to the originality of the ethnographer’s work. The text written by the ethnographer is under his or her “authorial control” (Tyler 1985, 93). The ethnographer interprets the dialogue, the “evidence” that he or she collected from the native, taking “ethnography of speaking” and changing native discourse into “data” that can be manipulated to suit different needs (93). Thus, the native voice remains “silent,” and perhaps no one except the ethnographer

will learn the original piece (92).

Mead addressed this fact that when she published *Coming of Age in Samoa*: “it seemed extremely unlikely that any of them [the girls that she had studied] would ever learn to read English” (Mead [1972] 1995, 154). In the following example, we only learn about the Arapesh culture from Mead’s words: “The Arapesh accepted with wonder and resignation the things that went wrong in the world” (Mead [1972] 1995, 197).

Tyler explains that in this type of “dialogical textualization,” the ethnographer’s act to reveal a way of living “only inasmuch as it takes away the living dialog,” is subjective and even has a fictional sense to it, which characterizes novelists as “tellers of tales” (Tyler 1985, 92).

The same can be said about photographs. The ethnographer's touch is powerful in capturing the needed scene and selecting later the ones that will make it into the work. Mead selected and added various photographs from the field into her work. She had many photographs, and we know that because she wrote about them in her autobiography. On page 201 of her autobiography is a picture of her possibly having a conversation with the Arapesh people titled “In Alitoa, Arapesh: with Nemausi and her mother Wasimai” (Mead [1972] 1995). The interaction is “silent” but serves the purpose; it is proof, a visual convincing tool, that Mead indeed spoke to the natives.

Mead produced a hybrid work and entwined a couple of genres. If we look at the autobiographical and ethnographic aspects of her text, we can see that the native sometimes is given a place in the background to make a room for Mead’s personal story. They become characters in a narrative in which the ethnographer, Mead, becomes the heroine (Tyler 1985, 94). For example:

As we discussed the problem, cooped up together in the tiny eight-foot-by-eight-foot mosquito room, we moved back and forth between analyzing ourselves and each other, as individuals, and the cultures that we knew and were studying, as anthropologists must. Working on the assumption that there were different clusters of inborn traits, each characteristic of a particular temperamental type, it became clear that Gregory and I were close together in temperament—represented, in fact, a male and a female version of a temperamental type that was in strong contrast with the one represented by Reo. It also became clear that it would be nonsensical to define the traits that Gregory and I shared as “feminine” and equally nonsensical to define the behavior of the Arapesh man as “maternal”…The intensity of our discussions was heightened by the triangular situation. Gregory and I were falling in love. (Mead [1972] 1995, 216-217)

The last type of intertextuality that can be detected in *Blackberry Winter* relates to “ethnographies of women” (Visweswaran 1997, 603). Kamala Visweswaran (1997) writes that “Margaret Mead was possibly not the first social scientist to develop a distinction between biological sex and sociologically distinct gender roles, but she was certainly the first to use ethnography to do so” (601). Mead in her autobiography is “portrayed as complex, exceptional, often heroic figur[e] who transcend[s] [her] cultur[e], … such that [her] class, race, or gender prejudices are overlooked or simply ignored” (Babcock 1992; Deacon 1997; Parezo 1993; and Weigle as quoted in Visweswaran 1997, 615). Mead relies on the “woman’s point of view,”[[26]](#footnote-27) and uses “knowledge of women in other cultures to cast light on [her] own” (616). Mead showed “how culture and environment shape different notions of womanhood” (603). She explored cross-cultural experiences of womanhood and writes about them in her autobiography; however, she does not identify with them:

Today, preparation for natural childbirth gives women a chance to learn and to think about the task of labor, instead of simply fearing how they will endure the pains. … But in societies in which men were forbidden to see birth, I have seen men writhing on the floor, acting out their conception of what birth pangs were like. In one such society, the wife herself had squatted quietly on a steep hillside in the dark and had cut the cord herself, following the instruction not of a trained midwife but of the woman who had most recently borne a child. (Mead [1972] 1995, 254)

*Order:*In her work Mead is very systematic in preparing and assembling bricolage, interpreting by thick description, and combining elements of different genres with artistic, creative, innovative elements while stressing her leading position; all of this gives the reader the chance to see the many facets and perspectives of her own and others. Mead uses intertextuality to clarify and set the order regarding her position as both a follower and a leader. She positions herself within this hierarchy.

# Conclusions

This section could be divided into two parts. The first has to do with the analyzed text of *Blackberry Winter*, and the second relates to the use of complexity theory to analyze life writing genres.

When I first began my study of *Blackberry Winter*, I assumed it to be an autobiography of Margaret Mead. Slowly, by rereading the book and expanding my theoretical background, I became more familiar and acquired a better understanding of genre development, its merging and blurring and how it is affected by the context and the author’s competence. With increased comprehension of the system theory, elements of continuity, the complexity theory, I realized the additive value of this application to the study of Mead’s work.

Mead is telling her life story as a first-person narrative, and it is relatively inclusive of the psycho-social facets and developmental stages of her individual life. The work is comprehensive because it deals with an extensive amount of experience, variety, well-roundedness, and interrelatedness in her life. Mead shares with her readers her method of collecting materials and how she edited her autobiographical account. We can see her creativity in using her methods and inventing new ones and incorporating extra elements in each research project. Two examples are the use of photographs and collaborative ethnographic research.

She clearly defines her audience without revealing whether her autobiography is science or art. But between the lines, Mead discusses the issue of art and science in composing ethnographic autobiography. So far, it could be told delicately that her autobiography is a mixture of the two with a greater inclination toward science, though to a great degree she addresses a wide range of audiences including the scientific community.

The study of society is rooted in Mead’s personality as an anthropologist. Her information appears valid, corresponding with her ability to choose reputable informants and refuse or fire other informants. Mead’s intuitive familiarity with the studied culture helped her write a strong autobiography, and it further developed as she spent more time with the societies she studied. Her knowledge was first hand, and after spending time in the field, she could estimate the status of informants and select people who were representative, articulate, and congenial with the interpreter. She mastered the languages of the studied groups, which increased her chances to address native cultures directly, and improved her familiarity with the culture while choosing many representative informants.

Mead was a master of theorizing and perspective, and this enabled her to see the relevant details needed to validate her hypothesis and progress with her theories. She interviewed informants using several techniques: passively and actively, formally and informally, standardized and non-standardized, and in the natural environment of the person or the group. It has been demonstrated that she took good care of the raw data provided by informants, and she imposed editorial judgments and provided interpretations and analyses. Editorially, there is no doubt the material was condensed and the narrative sequence altered; this is also made clear when comparing the data in the autobiography and the original paper.

Ethnographic autobiography is primarily psychology-oriented. Mead follows a timeline of her life that moves parallel to the chronological order of her research. She interjects herself into the life histories, expressing emotions and thoughts. She makes us familiar with her hesitation, confidence, stances, and attitudes. Her persona is present, and her mind is sharp. Mead discloses the impact of the field culture on her and her subjective biases and emotional predilections. To some extent, she is similar in this to Malinowski, who included subjective issues in his private diaries. This is not the only parameter that takes Mead’s autobiography out of the traditional ethnographic-autobiographic genre; she also portrays her own anthropological culture, which is the product of collective experiences and training.

Terms like bricolage and thick description were not strange to Mead. She heard about them, read about them, used them, and made a selection based on them. She acquired these skills from her family members, partners, and co-workers. These concepts were the foundation of her theory and built into her adopted method. She added innovation and sophistication to them by incorporating visual attributes and realizing the plus of collaborative ethnography.

Though Mead was aware of the complexity of society and culture, she selectively chose to deal with these complex aspects although it was related to the others and not to the “I.” By avoiding the I, her autobiography sounds incomplete and less literary. It was not a matter of omission, however, but choice, a deliberate act intended to render her autobiography more scientific. Mead gave her life a new meaning in addition to the one that related to her personal life. She was a master at blurring genres and thick description that approached complex cultural structures directly, but she deviated from discussing her internal personal world, thus leading the reader to see her reflection in the mirror through other cultures.

But I could also see the novelistic characteristics of Mead’s incomplete autobiography. As I became familiar with ethnography and its genres, I could feel the narrator, author, and her goal: to address the impact of her culture on herself and allow her work and early life to determine the boundaries of her future life; and with some determinism, her journey if nothing tragic happens. The creation of the fictive kin and its use in academic and daily life became clearer while reading more materials on Mead’s life and having a top-to-bottom look at her book, applying the complexity theory to it.

Another conclusion about Mead’s autobiography from the complex perspective offers insight into the spectrum of continuity at which this piece ranges. Concentrating on the dynamics and interactions of selected events and persons as if they were happening in an isolated space raises the suspicion that we are dealing with a unique type of novel, possibly situated at very different points on the scale of continuity for different types of novels. This conclusion became possible when I studied the concept of the total novel as given by authors of the complexity theory.

Applying complexity theory by using complex case study techniques offers a more holistic approach and a top-to-bottom look, not at the parts but at the interactions, to view the emergence of new things as a result of the system’s initial conditions.

The author and narrator can consider their work as they wish, but the reader can see the same work from a different perspective and choose to define it using their own methods. It is also possible to begin reading a piece as one genre and with further reading, the addition of new material, and a new analysis affiliate it with another genre, more than one genre, or an emerging genre.

Experimenting with complexity theory led to several conclusions. First, I realized that the dynamics of science and literature, as aspects of human activities, interact and evolve as our life bricolage, and this greatly enriched my knowledge. Second, thick description depends on our context and our competence but only on that, as our understanding of ourselves and our world is not complete. Though it seems complex to use this theory to study literary works, incorporating sophisticated algorithms from search machines will have a great advantage in classifying previous and newer works and offers a better understanding of the emergence of new genres and their merging and blurring.

Trying to define genres and allocating work to a specific genre may reduce its exposure to a larger audience, and this contradicts the diversity of readers’ views as they come to define the genre of a text on their own. An example of this has occurred with *Blackberry Winter*. Readers are attributing different genres to Mead’s autobiography on websites like Goodreads*[[27]](#footnote-28)* and Amazon (McAlister 2018).

Undoubtedly, the application of the complexity theory assists in capturing the big picture and understanding the dynamics as seen and hidden in the texts by the author. But the reader still has the chance to see the text from different perspectives. This new look at the whole while considering the book as a system interacting with author and reader creates more critical reading, increases curiosity, and feeds the imaginative capacity of the audience to see the narrative and discourse in close relationship with other events and persons, each adding a small sum to the emergence and self-organization of the narrator, author, or both.

Finally, I would like to answer the question of whether *Blackberry Winter* is a scientific or literary piece by saying this: It depends on the perspective of the author, the reader, the culture, the society, and other involved stakeholders. There is no one correct answer to this question, and I conclude that the co-existence of art and science could only augment the impact of the work on specific audiences and even on the author. The genre is a vehicle for the distribution and signification of the work written.

This is but a small attempt to move in a new direction, so please do not make final conclusions without first experimenting.

# Recommendations for Future Research

In his work “Algorithmic Analysis of Medieval Arabic Biographical Collections” (2017), Maxim Romanov states that there are approximately over a hundred thousand available digital biographical records on Islamic history and culture before the fifteenth century. Previously, these records were extracted by using mechanical organization techniques, such as index cards. Later, computers organized data from these sources on magnetic tapes and then on relational databases. But this did not solve the challenge that students and scholars imposed—to extract their needed data in less time.

Lately, we have come to notice a significant boom in data-driven studies based on digitalization that proposes new approaches. What Romanov suggests in his work is to use a method based on algorithmic analysis of Arabic biographical collections for example, claiming that similar techniques can be used to any type of text in any language if it fits criteria the algorithm can identify during the process of analysis (e.g., internal regularity). However, this algorithm abolishes the concept of genre. It focuses on premodern Islamic texts for historical purposes.

I claim that by focusing on transcultural life-writing genres across time, it will be possible to argue for a flexible scale of continuity that locates life-writing genres at different points or parallel to each other. Practically, determinants and textual factors could be fed to algorithms representing a specific genre with the minimum subset of factors. The algorithm could be run on big data consisting of literary texts to allocate these writings to life-writing genres as much as possible. This will show the history of the genres, the dynamics of their appearance, expansion, regression, and merging. Algorithms based on this model would enable readers to find more writings on specific genres or subgenres otherwise not defined by the usual bibliographic search engines.

I do hope that my research will lay the foundation for a broader study of universal human literature and science, including nongeneric transcripts. The latest major shift from auto/biography studies to life writing is not new and not the last. Genres appear, develop, expand, merge, and blur depending on the sociocultural context and other determinants. I am in favor of extending this research to other historical periods across cultures and genres and searching for more determinants to fill in the gap that possibly occurred across centuries; hopefully, this will resurface texts hidden from the digital eye that perhaps were never considered a genre.

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1. The term “life story” was favored by James L. Peacock and Dorothy C. Holland rather than “life-history.” By “life story” the scholars simply meant the story of someone’s life. For the purpose of this dissertation, “story” is used rather than “history” (Peacock and Holland 1993, 368). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson “The coming- of- age narrative, although structured differently in premodern life writing from the post- Enlightenment *bildungsroman*, with its developmental ideology and integrative teleology, has been with us at least since ancient epitaphs” (Smith and Watson 2010, 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Yaqut means “ruby”; a slave; full name Yaqut ibn ‘Abdallah (d. 1229). An author of *Kitab mu’jam al-buldan*, a collection of historical, geographical, and ethnographic information on the Arab world of his era; and *Mu’jam al-udaba*, a collection of biographical portrayals of the important men of his time. These works were organized encyclopedically and included valuable information for scholars about the Middle East and Central Asia during the years of the Abbasid Caliphate. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ibn Riḍwān was a “fifth/eleventh-century Cairene physician and self-proclaimed revisionist of the medical curriculum of his day,” and “he died sometime in the 460s [1060s–1070s]” (Reisman 2009, 559). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. As-told-to life writing according to Sandra Lindemann is defined as “the written account of a subject’s life produced by a writer, on the basis of an oral account produced by the subjects, over the course of a series of interviews. Although it is increasingly widely practiced, its theoretical, practical and ethnical challenges attract little scholarly attention” (Lindemann 2018, 523). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. More examples can be found in Margaret Mead’s introduction to *An Anthropologist at Work* ([1959] 2011, xviii). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Dorthe Berntsen writes that “Ebbinghaus (1885) explained involuntary conscious memories as a product of association” (Berntsen 2009, 6). Ebbinghaus noticed that “the occurrence of these involuntary reproductions is not an entirely random or accidental one. On the contrary they are brought about through instrumentality of other, immediately present mental images. Moreover they occur in certain regular ways which in general terms are described under the so-called ‘laws of association’” (as quoted in Berntsen 2009, 6–7). These associations were considered during Ebbinghaus’s time “as the basic building blocks of the mind.” Laws of association were essential “in theories about thought and memory during the Enlightenment” (Berntsen, 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Andrea C. Valente, “Autobiographical Genre in the Age of Complexity: A Case Study of Neuro Autobiographies,” **abstract**, *YorkSpace Institutional Repository*, (May 2017), http://hdl.handle.net/10315/33706 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Joseph N. Straus in his paper “The ‘Anxiety of Influence’ in Twentieth-Century Music” explains the term “anxiety of influence” coined by the literary critic Harold Bloom: “…an idea about the ambivalence a poet may feel toward an overwhelming and potentially stultifying tradition. This is the anxiety of influence—a fear of being swallowed up or annihilated by one’s towering predecessors. And, while this anxiety is often focused on a single predecessor or work, it may also be felt with regard to an earlier style. For Bloom, the history of poetry is the story of a struggle by newer poems against older ones, an anxious struggle to clear creative space” (Straus 1991, 436). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. There are several “why” questions in Bhatia’s book *Analyzing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings*. Among them are the following: “Why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?; . . .why a particular variety takes the form it does?; . . .why the members of a particular secondary culture write the way they do?; Why are specific discourse-genres written and used by the specialist communities the way they are?; Why do users of the genre use these features and not others?” (as quoted in Nielsen 1997, 208). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. A “*system* is simply the name given to an object studied in some field and might be abstract or concrete; elementary or composite; linear or non-linear; simple or complicated; complex or chaotic” (Rickles, Hawe, and Shiell 2007, 933). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Link to source: https://www.britannica.com/topic/mind-body-dualism [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Advocates of complexity theory claim that it is “a new scientific paradigm” (Mitchell 2009 as quoted in Cairney 2012, 346). This theory “suggests that we shift our analysis from individual parts of a system to the system as a whole; as a network of elements that interact and combine to produce systematic behaviour that cannot be broken down merely into the actions of its constituent parts. Rather, the aim is to identify what types of systematic output occur when its members follow the same basic rules, and how sensitive the system is, or what small changes in rules will produce profound changes in systematic behaviour. The metaphor of a microscope or telescope, in which we zoom in to analyze individual components or zoom out to see the system as a whole, sums up this shift of approach” (Cairney 2012, 346). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. According to Dean Rickles, Penelope Hawe, and Alan Shiell, “The interactions between the subunits of a complex system *determine* (or *generate*) properties in the unit system that cannot be reduced to the subunits (and that cannot be readily deduced from the subunits and their interactions). Such properties are known *as emergent properties*. In this way it is possible to have an upward (or *generative*) hierarchy of such levels, in which one level of organization determines the level above it, and that level then determines the features of the level above it. Emergent properties may also be *universal* or *multiply realisable* in the sense that there are many diverse ways in which the same emergent property can be generated” (Rickles, Hawe, and Shiell 2007, 934). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Complex systems “may contain ‘strange attractors’ or demonstrate extended regularities of behavior which are ‘liable to change radically’ ” (Bovaird 2008; Geyer and Rihani 2010 as quoted in Cairney 2012, 348). Cairney adds that “[t]hey may therefore exhibit periods of ‘punctuated equilibria – in which long periods of stability are interrupted by short bursts of change” (348). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Link to source:

    https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-45 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Causality in complexity thinking addresses “the dynamic nature of a complex case study [that] does not mean that it is possible to easily discern cause and effect or be able to use descriptions of system trajectories to be able to predict future behavior” (Haggis as quoted in Hetherington 2013, 77). Case boundaries, within the framework of the “unbounded nature of a complex systems perspective” means placing boundaries that can follow patterns that exist in the complex systems or not, and which locate a focus of interest on what will be included in the research (Hetherington 2013, 79). It “is an act of complexity reduction that locates the research within the research field *and* in the system that is researched” alongside the developing research (79). The positioning of the researcher and their role in the study, according to Stake, refers to the process of conducting a case study, during which “the researcher may take on multiple different roles, both consciously and unconsciously” (Stake as quoted in Hetherington 2013, 81). The concept “is important in considering the positions of the researcher and their role in collecting and interpreting the data gathered in case study research” (Hetherington 2013, 81). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Following Edgar Morin: “Text and complex share the same Latin etymology of *texus*, woven; by nature, texts are complex systems” (as cited in Majola-Leblond 2015, 171). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. In this case, “Reflexivity is an aftermath of experience and refers to the conscious use of the self as a resource for making sense of others” (Galani-Moutafi 2000, 222). This anthropological other according to Sundar Sarukkai “is based on the notion of perceived differences and is a cognitive process involving observation, collection of data and theorizing” (Sarukkai 1997, 1406). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Alfred Hornung for the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) 2006 conference in Mainz on Auto/Biography and Mediation. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. We should “consider also the intuition that genre membership tends to be multiple, and a matter of degree, and that genres tend to change internally over time, and combine with others” (Duff as quoted in Sinding 2010, 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Link to source: https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/chaos [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Link to source: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/chaos [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. According to Bruce Merry, “the diary is an intimate journal, a personal dialogue between the writer and his private *persona*, in which anything can be discussed outside the push and pull of editorial fashion” (Merry 1979, 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Travelogue in Life Writing: Life Writing – “A modern term meant to cover the general realm of non-fictional writings about the lives, experiences, and memories of individual people or small groups of people. Thus although excluding most other kinds of history or ethnology it includes autobiography, biography, hagiography, apology, and memoir, along with certain kinds of diary, journal, letter, travelogue, and personal essay”. Link to source: https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100105150. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Lutkehaus writes that “Mead likened the techniques of the fieldworker to that of the novelist (as quoted in Visweswaran 1997, 603), Kaberrry (1939) concurred that “the anthropologist needs the eye of a novelist…” (as quoted in Visweswaran 1997, 603). Visweswaran (1997) claims that “ “Ethnographies of women,” then, reveal considerable forethought and reflexivity about the conditions of textual production, often deliberately using “fiction” as a strategic narrative device to relay a “woman’s point of view.” In these texts, however, the function of a “woman’s point of view” is to specify cultural difference and is not a point of identification between author, subject, and audience” (603). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Link to source: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/111370.Blackberry\_Winter. Please search for the label “Genres” that shows the readers genre classification of the work. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)