

# ONE QUESTION, ONE ANSWER:

**Julie Myerson,**  
author of *Nonfiction: A Novel*

**Nanci McCloskey, Associate Publisher of Tin House:**

The title of your book, *Nonfiction: A Novel*, is unexpected. Can you tell us how you came to it and if the title is teasing that the book has an autofiction element?

**Julie Myerson, author of *Nonfiction: A Novel*:**

I was possibly about halfway through writing the book and found I was writing about writing (something in all my career I swore I'd never do!) and this worried me a bit. But it seemed to be working; it felt real and urgent and truthful, so I persisted. Then, I was reading the Sunday papers in bed and saw the word "nonfiction" and I just knew it was my title. I knew. Such an obvious word, a word we use all the time when talking about writing. And yet to my knowledge, no one had ever called a novel *Nonfiction*. It's kind of brutal. It contains no flavour or atmosphere. It's workmanlike. It's just itself. With the two parts "non" and "fiction," it seemed to encompass everything I was—I now discovered to my surprise!—writing about.

I had to look up a precise definition of "autofiction" because it isn't a term I think about very much, and absolutely not, this is not autofiction, it is a novel. Apart from the character of the mother, which is written more or less as I'd have written it in a memoir (i.e. those episodes did really happen, though that is still only my highly subjective POV), every other aspect is fiction.

None of the other characters are from my own real life. People might say otherwise, but even the narrator is not (in my view) me! I like to think I have a better sense of humour than she does! Certainly the husband and the daughter are nothing like my husband and daughter (who is happy and bright and in fact a successful writer herself). And the lover is a complete fiction.

However, it is also true to say that I probably couldn't have written as authentically or urgently about the subject of heroin addiction if we hadn't experienced it in the family. Or could I? My other novels are actually full of very dramatic events like murder, which are not taken from personal experience.

It's also true that, though the lover isn't a real person, that idea of meeting someone from your youth who makes you feel, for a fleeting moment anyway, that things might have been different—especially if the circumstances of one's current life are traumatic and sad, infused with guilt—well, that's certainly something that's crossed my mind. I think it crosses all of our minds.

What I was trying to address in this novel is this—*any* kind of storytelling will always drive people to speculate about what is or isn't straight from the author's life. In fact, these days people seem obsessed with these categorisations. Probably too much so in my view. But I know, of course I do, that I've made myself a target for

this kind of speculation because I have already published a memoir (*The Lost Child*) on this subject. This novel will always seem to have echoes of reality, even though it is, at the end of the day, entirely fictional. Or is it?! As a writer, I admit I also found myself wanting to engage and even play with that very idea! If the reader finishes the novel still wondering what is true and what isn't, well, that's fine. It's actually precisely what I wanted to do. And therefore, yes, the title *Nonfiction* is a total tease. and why not?!

To be honest, I don't really see why the title is such a big deal. I would say that all fiction is nonfiction in some senses of the word. What novels aren't coloured by aspects of the author's own real life? The only difference here is that I'm actively trying to engage with that idea. What I've always loved about writing fiction is that it makes you write about the things you didn't know you already knew. In that sense, this book is no different at all from all my other novels. Half of what is in it, I had no idea I was going to write. And—in a final full circle move—all of this is discussed in the scenes with the narrator and her writing student. In that way, everything I know, or have ever known about writing, is in this book.