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## Fictionalizing Memoirs: A Study of Autofiction in Jenny Offill's *Weather*

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### Abstract

Literature is a subject of continuous additions and developments. Throughout its history, many new genres appeared to satisfy the needs of the readers who seek novel creations in this magnificent field. One of these genres in this age is autofiction. It refers to works which deal with the author's own life but re-written with imagination, or in other words, with recreation of the author's real experience. The present research attempts to shed light upon autofiction. This paper handles Jenny Offill's *Weather*. The study is divided into three sections and a conclusion. Section one deals with the introduction which handles autofiction as a hybrid genre that blends autobiography with fiction. Also it highlights the ability of this genre to offer more creative and critical potential. The second section deals with the history and characteristics of autofiction, tracing its development from Serge Doubrovsky's original concept to its postmodern and multimedia expressions. It shows the importance of autofiction in emphasizing the silenced voices, serving as a means of self-exploration and social critique. This section also clarifies how autofiction differentiates itself from memoir, autobiography, and biography, by offering more narrative independence and ambiguity. The final section adopts a theoretical framework through which *Weather* is examined, focusing on Offill's distinctive narrative method and her application of autofictional strategies. The paper concludes by summarizing the key findings of the study.

Keywords: Autofiction, Jenny Offill, memoir, *Weather*.

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## تخييل المذكرات: دراسة في السيرة الذاتية المتخيّلة

لجيني أوفيل *Weather* في رواية

أ. شيماء عبدالله جاسم (جامعة تكريت)

و

محمد وسام مزاحم (جامعة تكريت)

### المستخلص

يخضع الادب للتحديث والتنمية المستمرة. على مر التاريخ، ظهرت أجناس أدبية جديدة لتلبية احتياجات القراء الذين يبحثون عن إبداعات جديدة في هذا المجال. احدى هذه الأجناس في العصر الحالي هو الخيال الذاتي. وهو جنس قصصي يشير إلى الأعمال التي تتعامل مع حياة المؤلف نفسه ولكن تم كتابتها مع الخيال، أو بعبارة أخرى، كتابة قصة حياة المؤلف مع مزجها بأحداث من الخيال.

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى إلقاء الضوء على النوع الادبي المسمى الخيال الذاتي. يتناول البحث رواية "طقس" للكاتبة جيني أوفيل. قسمت الدراسة إلى ثلاثة مباحث وخاتمة. يمثل المبحث الأول المقدمة حيث يلقي الضوء على الخيال الذاتي كجنس هجين يجمع بين السيرة الذاتية والخيال. كما يبرز القدرة على هذا الجنس لتقديم إمكانات إبداعية ونقدية أكثر.

تناول المبحث الثاني تاريخ وخصائص الخيال الذاتي، بدايةً من تطوره من مفهوم سيرج دوبروفسكي إلى تعبيرات ما بعد الحداثة.. يتحدث هذا القسم أيضًا كيف يختلف الخيال الذاتي عن المذكرات، السيرة الذاتية، والسيرة الذاتية، من خلال تقديم استقلالية سردية وغموض أكبر.

يتبنى القسم الثالث إطارًا نظريًا من خلاله يتم فحص رواية "الطقس"، مع التركيز على أسلوب السرد المميز للكاتبة وتطبيق استراتيجيات الخيال الذاتي. يختتم البحث بتلخيص النتائج الرئيسية للدراسة.

## Section one

### 1.1 Introduction

Literature is constantly undergoing transformation, as writers continuously seek to create innovative ideas and styles of expression. As outcome of this creative movement, new literary styles are constantly emerging. The complexities of modern reality have contributed to the notable variation of literary genres, and the marked disparity in readers' tastes has encouraged authors to create multiple texts that address these differences. In recent years, the boundaries between fiction and autobiography have become more and more blurred, leading to the rise of a hybrid literary genre known as autofiction. This form overlaps with autobiographical narrative and employs novelistic techniques, blending reality and fiction in a way that blurs the traditional lines between them. Jenny Offill's novel, *Weather*, is a prominent example of this style, reflecting overlapping levels of personal and collective anxiety. Offill relies on a precise, fragmented structure in her narrative that mimics the spontaneous flow of ideas, presenting the daily life of the protagonist, immersed in her personal concerns and societal issues. Offill describes this structural style as embodying the movement of thought, allowing the reader deep insight into the protagonist's inner consciousness and her interactions with issues such as climate change without resorting to a direct linear narrative (Craddock, 2020).

Offill's narrative style mirrors her tendency to avoid what is known as "self-righteousness" in her handling of sensitive matters such as the climate crisis, choosing to seamlessly integrate them into the details of daily life (Craddock, 2020). Offill intertwines personal experience with a pointed social critique through Lizzie's character. In an interview, Offill expressed her desire to construct a novel structure that explores how we could live if we chose to be a society of dignity rather than one of fear. She uses backgrounds like libraries—one of the few remaining “noncommercial spaces...where everyone is welcome”—as metaphors for community and solidarity (The Paris Review, 2020).

Offill has also likened *Weather* to a "Trojan Horse" meaning it subtly introduces profound themes, such as political instability and climate change, within an approachable narrative, reaching readers who may not actively seek engagement with these topics (Craddock, 2020). This approach allows her to portray Lizzie's growing engagement with complex issues in a simple yet powerful way. This accurate portrayal of societal concerns makes *Weather* both a commentary on contemporary anxieties and a deeply personal narrative, perfectly in keeping with the goals of autofiction by weaving fiction and memoir together to reflect individual and societal realities.

### 1.2 The Argument of the Study

The study argues that blending autobiography with fiction creates a more interesting and creative works. It tries to explain the method used by the writer to make such a literary work. It also examines his style and the techniques used.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

The study holds important implications. It shows how the writer represents his own story within autofictional framework. Moreover, it presents a new genre to readers.

### 1.4 Aims of the Study

The present study aims at showing how the novelist employed his own story within the frame of autofiction. It also attempts to explore the structure and content of the novel within the frame of autofiction.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

The idea of "Fictionalizing Memoirs" in Jenny Offill's book *Weather* through autofiction refers to the blending of real life experiences with fiction. Offill mixes personal experiences with imagined stories to create a rich narrative. The book uses modern writing styles like fragmented thoughts and self-reflection to show how memory can be selective and unreliable. This helps the reader see the main character's struggles with her identity and how she views herself.

The story also includes references to other literary works, which helps to place personal stories within larger social discussions, especially concerning current issues like anxiety about the environment and politics. By doing this, *Weather* invites readers to think critically about what is real and what is made up, ultimately deepening our understanding of personal and shared experiences in today's world.

### **1.6 Questions of the study**

1. Is autofiction an important genre ?
2. How do the real and fictional overlap in an autofiction work ?
3. What are the techniques used by the author to accomplish his task as an autofiction writer ?

## **Section Two**

### **2.1 Autofiction: History and Characteristics**

Autofiction, a genre that merges autobiographical and fictional elements, has gained prominence for its unique ability to blur the lines between reality and imagination. This narrative mode, introduced by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, allows authors to transform real events into fictional narratives without strict adherence to factual accuracy (Dix, 2017, p. 50). Doubrovsky's concept was rooted in the desire to convey the truth about the self through fictionalized narratives, thereby challenging traditional boundaries between autobiography and fiction (Gibbons, 2010). This idea was influenced by earlier theoretical work, such as Philippe Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact" from the 1970s, which identifies the possibility of a work in which the author, narrator, and character share the same name (Miceli, 2024, p. 143). However, the genre has evolved, with critics like Philippe Gasparini suggesting that autofiction is characterized by narrative techniques that create autobiographical instability, rather than merely the use of the author's proper name (Cruz-Grunerth, 2024, p. 159).

Autofiction is grounded in intellectual foundations rooted in poststructuralism, which adds to its complexity. Prominent theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man have raised questions about the stability of identity and the reliability of narrative, contributing to a theoretical framework for this literary genre. De Man's concept of "Autobiography as De-Facement" reflects the idea that autobiographical texts are inherently fictional, transcending the traditional boundaries of literary genres (De Man, 1979, p. 920). This poststructuralist perspective highlights the genre's focus on the subjective nature of truth, where autobiographical accounts are viewed as constructions

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filtered through the author's lens, blending reality with fiction. The historical development of autofiction also reflects its transformation from a "mauvais genre" or "bad genre" to a respected literary form. Initially met with skepticism, the genre has since gained traction, particularly in the French literary scene, influenced by authors like Alain Robbe Grillet, Claude Simon, and Nathalie Sarraute, who were already blending referential and fictional components in their works (Wagner-Egelhaaf, 2019, p. 489). Critics like Philippe Lejeune have critiqued autofiction for complicating the reader's task of distinguishing truth from invention, while others, like Manuel Alberca, view it as a renewal of the autobiographical genre, offering fresh perspectives on personal narratives (Alberca, 2007, p. 120).

In addition to literature, autofiction has expanded into other media, particularly in the realm of cinema. Autofictional documentaries, such as Cyan Bae's "Dear Chaemin" (2020), parallel literary autofiction by blending reality with artistic interpretation. These films, like their literary counterparts, often feature the filmmaker inserting themselves into the narrative, employing stylistic techniques that blur the boundaries between truth and fiction. Forné and López-Gay (2022) describe this cinematic mode as a contemporary approach that challenges and subverts the generic limits of documentary and fiction films from a self-reflexive perspective, characterized by aesthetic ambiguity that reinterprets real events through a novelistic lens.

Autofiction is not strictly a genre but rather a term that describes a specific type of fiction. It often lacks a dedicated section in bookstores and is categorized under its primary genre when pitched to agents (Jones, 2018). This narrative mode emphasizes the author's relationship with their work, deliberately blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. This approach enables authors to explore the complexities of identity and memory (Dix, 2017, p. 51). Typically, autofiction depicts a protagonist who similarly symbolizes the author, often sharing the same name and significant life events. This similarity allows for in-depth self-exploration and create a narrative that readers can connect to as both personal and universal (Saunders, 2019).

Autofiction is characterized by its integration of autobiographical and fictional elements within the same narrative. This interplay allows authors to navigate personal histories while employing creative storytelling, thereby give emphasis to the structured nature of autobiographical reality (Wagner-Egelhaaf, 2019, p. 493). A crucial aspect of the genre is its emphasis on the subjective nature of truth and the fluidity of self-representation, highlighting the fragility of identity. This narrative approach encourages readers to engage in the imaginative play of fiction while simultaneously conveying the authenticity of lived experiences (Wagner-Egelhaaf, 2019, p. 495; Effe & Gibbons, 2022, p. 64).

Moreover, this literary genre often incorporates elements from multiple media, including digital and visual forms, to enhance its examination of self-identity (Wagner-Egelhaf, 2019, p. 497). The use of multimedia elements in autofiction is evident in the merging of digital identities and self-representations. Régine Rubin argues that technological advances further complicate the limitations between reality and fiction (Rubin, 2005, p. 75)

The development of autofiction can be traced back to earlier literary practices, such as the eighteenth-century concept of "editors' fictions," which presented texts as original autobiographies accomplished by fictional editors. This historical precedent laid

the foundation for the merging of realistic and fictional elements, influencing subsequent autofictional works by authors such as Serge Doubrovsky and Bernward Vesper

The ability of autofiction to reconstruct reality through a propagated narrative forces readers or viewers to adapt their interpretive approaches. Worthington (2018) explains that the blending of realistic and fictional elements creates a complex dynamic through which the audience must navigate the text as both autobiographical and fictional. Gérard Genette's exploration of literary genres provides further insight, asserting that autofiction involves a narrative in which the boundaries between the author's real life and the fictional elements within the text are blurred (Genette, 1997, p. 18).

The hybrid nature of autofiction, which introduces itself as both fiction and reality, adds a layer of complexity that provoke readers to engage with the text on multiple levels. Henrik Skov Nielsen describes autofictional texts as they embodying "fiction and nonfiction" simultaneously (Effe & Gibbons, 2022, p. 62). This duality leads readers to question the veracity of the events depicted and the authenticity of the author's self-representation, prompting them to engage with the text beyond the confines of traditional genre. By blending real-life events with fiction, autofiction provides a unique means for examining the complexities of human experience, allowing authors to reinterpret and reimagine their life stories in deeply personal, yet universally resonate ways (Jajdelska, 2020, p. 22).

The focus of autofiction on narrative ambiguity is a defining feature of this genre. By highlighting the distinction between what truly happened and what could have happened, autofiction turns this ambiguity into a central narrative device, adding layers of complexity and deepening the reader engagement on a deeper level. This technique breaks the rules of traditional literary genres, creating a mixed form that challenges easy classification and the genre limitations, resulting in new storytelling styles. Some autofictional works includes aspects of fantasy, surrealism, and speculative fiction, complicating typical autobiographical standards. The growth of autofiction is seen as a response to postmodernism, which questions large narratives and acknowledges the complex nature of identity in the contemporary world (Dix, 2017, pp. 62-85). This genre elevates subjective experience as a reflexive site for uncovering the ongoing transformations of identity, emphasizing its fluid and multifaceted nature. Centered around the narrator's self-narrative, the genre explores the discursive structures of identity as a complex product of psychological and social interactions, revealing the synthetic and constructed nature of personal history and permeating the subtle manifestations of the self as an entity constantly reshaped by overlapping and conflicting influences (Dix, 2017, p. 64).

At its core, this narrative genre fosters strategies of critical reception. The lack of trust in the narrator's credibility prompts the reader to deconstruct the discursive structure of the text, reconsider notions of truth and representation, and become aware of the interpretive nature of every narrative of reality (Dix, 2017, p. 66). This reflective engagement is not merely a critical practice, but rather a structural condition for understanding autobiographical writing as a space in which the real intersects with the imaginary. It challenges the limits of self-knowledge by revealing the fragmented and multiple nature of narrative truths.

## **2.2 The Importance of Autofiction**

Autofiction plays a crucial role in giving voice to those on the margins of society, providing a creative space where authors can move beyond the limitations of conventional autobiography. It enables a deeper and more self-expression of identity, mainly for individuals whose stories are often excluded from mainstream discourse. This formal freedom gives writers the ability to challenge and reshape the social and cultural narratives that shape their identities (Dix, 2017, p. 69-70). Additionally, Donna Haraway's theory of situated knowledge emphasizes how autofiction connects individual experiences to a specific social and political reality, giving these narratives depth and significance. Haraway (1988) claims that all knowledge is fundamentally restricted and formed by contexts; autofiction becomes a tool for conveying these nuanced contextual perspectives. By weaving dissimilar perspectives into a unified narrative, autofiction not only disrupts traditional storytelling bonds but also fosters dialogue and understanding through different experiences, enhancing its role as a transformative force in contemporary literature.

In a post-Freudian and post-deconstructionist context, where traditional notions of the stable and authentic self have been dismantled, autofiction gains particular significance. For example, Ricardo Lísias's use of a photocopied version of a nonexistent text reflects the literal absence of the "original," reinforcing the notion that autofiction may be the only viable form of autobiography in such a world (Miceli, 2024, p. 151). This highlights the role of autofiction in addressing the complexities of identity and self in modern literature. Furthermore, autofiction is often viewed as a performative act, categorized by the creation of characters who voice on behalf of the author and by literary thoughts within the text itself (Miceli, 2024, p. 147). These performances not only engage readers but also challenge their participation in the "imaginative game," making autofiction a forceful and interactive genre. The hybrid nature of the genre challenges traditional distinctions between fiction and reality, provoking readers to engage with the text on various levels. Gasparini (2008) highlights how this blending enriches the relationship between life and literature that deepening the complexity of the interconnection.

A defining feature of this genre lies in its ability to turn deeply personal stories into reflections that speak to worldwide subjects. It adds the genre both emotional resonance and wide-reaching significance by encouraging readers to engage intimately while reconsidering their assumptions about certainty and reality. According to Dix (2017, p. 80), autofiction fosters hybrid narrative voice that resists conventional storytelling by embracing ambiguity and fluidity. This distinctive voice arises from the author's dual role and the protagonist of the narrative and the one crafting its form. Through this structure the genre disrupts the traditional between the narrator and the narrated.

Autobiographical fiction or autofiction offers a captivating perspective on exploring identity as a fluid and ever-evolving construct shaped by internal dynamics and external influences. At the heart of this genre lies the recognition of identity is not static but composed of ongoing transformations. It enables writers to employ their own lives to grapple with and confront the inherent contradictions and multilayered realities of contemporary existence. This rare and authentic manifestation enhances self-representation and prompts readers to engage with the prose on multiple levels. Moreover, this genre is important for highlighting traditionally marginalized voices and

provides an opportunity for a narrative dimension that includes the personal while simultaneously emphasizing the broader social aspects of the story. For example, we can consider how Reinaldo Arenas uses autofiction to document his experiences of exile, repression, and disobedience to the Castro regime, in what he calls “documenting personal experiences within a fictional framework, authors contribute to the preservation and understanding of cultural histories and social issues (Smith, 2024, p. 315). Belsey (2002) also explores the ways in which autofiction allows for the merging of the personal and the political, stating that the blending of personal history and political commentary allows authors to navigate their own identities while addressing wider societal forces.

The intersection of personal stories and political themes in autofiction enables it to be a powerful form of social expression, especially for those whose voices have been historically ignored. As Cusset (2002) explains, “autofiction in its quest of self-discovery, becomes a tool for broader social critique, enabling authors to challenge dominant narratives and present alternative perspectives” (p. 5). By blending personal experiences with broader social realities, the genre not only personalizes major historical events but also deepens the collective memory of a culture. This mixture of self-reflection and political awareness allows authors to question accepted standards and resist dominant ideologies, inspiring readers to think critically about concerns such as identity, history, and social structures. Authors like Karl Ove Knausgaard and Sheila Heti represent this approach, using their personal lives as material to explore the personal and imaginary elements of captivating narratives (Peterson, 2018). Hywel Dix (2023) highlights that autofiction “combines the life stories of authors with collective struggles of their societies to restore view historical injustices that have been marginalized and forgotten”. In this way autofiction acts as both a mode of personal expression and a medium for social and cultural resistance.

Celia Hunt emphasizes the profound cognitive and emotional effect of autofiction, describing it as “a cognitive-emotional tool with very powerful therapeutic benefits” (Hunt, 2018, p. 191). This style of writing gives writers space to reflect on their own experiences, reshaping them into imagined stories that shed light on different ways of understandings themselves and the world around them. Margaret-Anne Hutton reinforces this view, stating that autofiction “provides a means for writers to engage in self-analysis and to confront personal traumas in a controlled, creative environment” (Hutton, 2021, p. 91). This therapeutic aspect of autofiction not only benefits the authors but also allows readers to engage with the narrative on a personal level, experiencing a form of vicarious therapy through the text. The genre's hybrid nature and openness to other forms, incorporating elements from essays, visual arts, and beyond, create a “fertile space of discussion and interchange,” particularly in the age of new media, which fosters interaction among various cultural agents, such as readers, journalists, and academics (Miceli, 2024, p. 147).

Autofiction can be understood as a “cultural performance” of authorship, where the boundaries between the writer's public and fictional personas become blurred, resulting in a conscious enactment of authorial identity (Miceli, 2024, p. 148). Autobiographical fiction, a closely related genre, is profoundly influenced by the author's personal life experiences. This genre merges fact and fiction, weaving real-life events and personal insights into the narrative. Miguel de Cervantes's novel *Don Quixote* serves as an early example of autobiographical influence in fiction with his personal experiences,

such as his battles, imprisonment, and extensive travels, adding to the novel a sense of depth and authenticity (McCabe, 2016). The broader cultural significance of autobiographical narratives with modern issues around self-definition in an era shaped by rapid technological advancement and media saturation. Digital platforms have transformed how individuals shape and project their identities, a shift encapsulated by the concept of "Cyber-Sui", which questions conventional understandings of self in autofictional contexts (Rubin, 2005, p. 80). Autofiction engages with these complexities, offering rich insights into how identity is constructed today and highlighting the increasingly blurred boundaries between lived experience and mediated reality.

The interplay between reality and fiction, while clearly present in Cervantes's works, is a hallmark of many literary texts. Writers often incorporate autobiographical elements into their narratives, using fiction as a creative lens to express personal facts and experiences, which in turn enhances the reader's engagement with the text. These narratives often mirror the cultural and historical context of their time, providing insight into how the writer's life influenced their work. By grounding criticism in a personal perspective, autobiographical narrative becomes a compelling structure of cultural commentary, empowering writers to confront societal concerns through the lens of lived experience (Dix, 2017, p. 82). This personal angle enhances the relevance and emotional impact of their criticism. Alberca (2007, p. 125) highlights the adaptability of the genre, remarking its ability to incorporate a wide range of narrative techniques and styles. This narrative diversity allows for larger inclusivity, positioning autofiction as a dynamic and reachable platform for various voices and cultural expression.

Despite its strengths, autofiction draws criticism for potentially crossing ethical boundaries, particularly when it portrays real people and events. This combination of reality and fiction can blur the boundaries of privacy and actuality, raising apprehensions about the responsible demonstration of others and the potential to mislead readers (Doyle, 2018). Since its emergence, the genre has consistently tested the boundaries between reality and fiction, highlighting the ongoing tension between the real and the fictional (DiBattista & Whitman, 2014). However, scholars highlight the powerful critical potential of the genre. Timothy Matthews states that "autofiction opens new possibilities for critiquing societal norms and exploring alternative ways of being" (Matthews, 2019, p. 131), signifying how it can challenge dominant narratives and encourage new perspectives. Autofiction opens a vibrant space for marginalized voices, challenging established narrative traditions and enriching literature with more inclusivity. As Gilmore (2019, p. 151) notes, its transformative potential lies in its ability to disrupt conventional narratives styles, making room for recognition and affirmation of often silenced perspectives. The engagement of this genre with personal experiences reflects broader cultural and social struggles, providing a perspective through which modern issues can be explored with depth and nuance (Dix, 2017, p. 83). In this way, autofiction invites readers into a more empathetic and critical dialogue about pressing social realities.

An increasing number of scholars and critics are exploring autofiction, drawn to its growing influence on both literature and literary theory. The genre has sparked rich discussions about its definitions, the creative choices authors make within it, and the unclear line between lived experience and fictional creation. These discussions have deepened our literary understanding and opened up fresh ways of thinking about how reality and imagination can intertwine within narrative forms.

### 2.3 Differences between Autofiction and Other Literary Genres

#### Memoir

Writers have long employed personal narratives to understand and share their experiences with others. Among these forms, memoir stands out as a genre that emphasizes self-reflection and subjectivity, typically focusing on a specific period of time or a transformative moment rather than an entire life. Shakir (2023) suggests that memory is the ability to remember and use some particular events that happened in the past in the service of the present. In contrast to autobiography, which follows a linear overarching narrative, memoir focuses on the writer's inner thoughts and emotional truth (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

When considering the difference, memoirs tend to focus on meaningful moments or specific periods of a person's life, pointing to capture the emotional truth of those experiences rather than offering a purely factual account. The word "memoir" is derived from the French word *mémoire*, meaning "memory," reflecting the profound roots of the genre in personal reflection and the act of recalling. Contrasting autobiographies, which cover an individual's entire life, memoirs characteristically concentrate on specific themes or periods in time. As noted by StudioBinder (2024), "A memoir is a non-fiction story set in the author's past during a specific period of their life," allowing for a more intimate exploration of feelings and emotions rather than a comprehensive account of one's life.

Memoirs are distinguished by their narrative style, which frequently incorporates vivid storytelling elements, including dialogue and character development. The author's perspective is central to the narrative; as Studio Binder (2024) explains, "This means that facts can be embellished, with an emphasis on feelings and emotions". This flexibility enables authors to intertwine personal experiences into compelling narratives that resonate with readers on an emotional level.

Memoir is characterized by a commitment to presenting personal events and insights as accurately as possible. While memoirists often employ narrative techniques to enhance their stories—such as adjusting details for coherence or dramatic effect—the foundation of memoir is rooted in factual recounting. The primary objective of the memoirist is to provide an authentic portrayal of their lived experiences, although the narrative may be shaped to improve readability and emotional engagement (Brown, 2024). Ethical considerations in memoir writing are crucial; the writer must ensure that any embellishments do not compromise the factual basis of the account or mislead the reader. Striking a balance between factual accuracy and narrative necessity is essential for maintaining the integrity of the memoir.

The controversy surrounding James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* exemplifies the challenges of maintaining a balance between narrative and truth. Initially presented as a memoir, the book faced significant backlash when discrepancies between Frey's account and the actual events were revealed. This controversy underscores the importance of clear genre boundaries and the reader's expectation of authenticity in memoirs (Brown, 2024). Such incidents highlight the necessity for memoirists to navigate the delicate line between storytelling and factual representation.

Autofiction merges elements of autobiography with fictional storytelling, positioning the author as both narrator and character within the narrative. The fusion of truth and imagination creates a fluid storytelling space where lived experiences can be reworked with artistic intent. Through the use of imagined scenes and fictional elements, authors gain more creative range allowing them to heighten both the deeper meaning and the emotional impact of their narratives.

In autofiction, writers often resort to third-person narration to recount their personal experiences, a choice that enables them to weave in characters and significant moments from their lives. Unlike traditional memoirs or autobiographies, this approach deliberately blurs the line between fact and fiction. By blending fictional elements with real-life events, writers gain more creative space to delve into themes such as identity and self-examination, free from the strict limitations of factual accuracy.

Autofiction, unlike traditional memoir does not strive for an entirely factual or objective portrayal of the author's life. Rather, it embraces imaginative techniques to explore and probe the self (Brown, 2024). These stories often include imagined scenes or shift between points of view, pushing past the usual limits of autobiographical writing. Autofiction is more about employing a creative narrative style to deeply analyze the internal side of humans, rather than documenting life incidents.

Though Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* is often considered as imaginative, it is deeply autobiographical, drawing profoundly from his own experiences to create a reflective narrative that explores themes of identity and personal growth through a fictional viewpoint (Brown, 2024). Along with works like Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Hervé Guibert's *To the Friend Who Did not Save My Life*, it exemplifies how autofiction combines fictional narrative with real-life experiences. These texts emphasize the unique ability of the genre to express emotional truths while blending the boundaries between reality and fiction. Likewise, Plath's *The Bell Jar*, while rooted in real experiences, uses fictional elements to explore themes of identity and mental health in a more profound way than a traditional memoir.

In her argument, Smit-James (2023) discusses the differences between memoir and autofiction. She explains, "Memoir is your true story, it's a nonfiction piece. Everything in it is true, or as close to true as possible. We do not always remember exactly everything that happened and sometimes we have to draw on our faulty recollection... Memoir is a true story, and autofiction is based on a true story" (1:50). She also notes that even minor alterations in names, dates, or events can transform a work from memoir to autofiction.

### **Differences between Autofiction and Autobiography**

Autofiction combines elements of autobiography and fiction, blending real-life experiences with imaginative components. Unlike autobiography, which seeks to provide an accurate and factual account of the author's life, autofiction offers greater artistic freedom and the opportunity for fictionalization. In autofiction, the author may choose to modify details, create fictional scenarios, or introduce imaginary characters to explore personal themes in a more symbolic or narrative-driven manner.

An autobiography is a self-written account of an individual's life. The author narrates personal experiences, often reflecting on their thoughts and feelings while situating their story within a broader cultural or historical context. This genre enables individuals to share their unique perspectives and insights into their lives. The term

derives from the Greek roots (self), (life), and (to write) (SuperSummary, 2004). In contrast, autofiction blurs the line between fact and fiction, creating a hybrid narrative that allows authors to explore themes of identity, memory, and self-perception without the constraints of strict factual accuracy.

### **Differences between Autofiction and Biography**

Autofiction and biography represent two distinct approaches to life writing, each characterized by unique methodologies and purposes. Autofiction merges autobiographical elements with fiction, allowing the author to create a narrative that intertwines fact and imagination. Typically self-authored, it permits creative liberties in portraying personal experiences, offering a subjective and imaginative recounting of the author's life. In contrast, a biography is a factual and comprehensive account of someone else's life, written by another individual. Biographies are based on extensive research and draw on diverse sources such as historical documents and interviews, striving for objectivity. Unlike autofiction, in which reality and fantasy are intertwined, biographies provide an outsider's view of the subject's existence, aiming to provide a balanced and factually accurate account.

A biography is a written account of a person's life, usually written by another person, detailing significant events and milestones in clear chronological order. The term "biography" (BYE-og-ruh-fee) comes from the Latin word *biographia*, which combines *bios* (meaning life) and *graphia* (meaning writing) (SuperSummary, 2007). While autofiction, as a literary form, often involves a combination of personal insights and fictional elements, traditional biographies emphasize factual accuracy and structured storytelling, presenting a complete and well-documented picture of a person's life. These different approaches to life writing reveal the diverse range between creative expression and factual documentation.

On the other hand, autofictional novels and works draw on the author's life experiences and combine them with fictional elements to deepen the narrative and discover wider themes such as identity, purpose, and self-discovery. This style sets autofiction apart from traditional biographies, which usually focus on accurate reporting and are commonly expressed from a third-person point of view to offer a detailed portrayal of another person's life story.

In summary, autofiction combines elements of reality and imagination to explore personal themes, offering a flexible and reflective style of storytelling. Memoirs, on the other hand, focus on real-life events and often emphasize emotional truth rather than factual accuracy. Biographies take an outsider's and objective approach by documenting someone else's life, while autobiographies offer a direct, in-depth account from the author's own standpoint. Understanding these different styles of life writing enables readers to better understand how personal narratives are crafted and interpreted in literature.

## **Section Three**

### **3.1 An Insight into Jenny Offill's *Weather***

Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020) offers a sharp and fragmented meditation on modern anxiety, weaving together concerns about climate change, political instability, and the fragility of character. The novel follows Lizzie Benson, a librarian facing the

pressures of daily life while being pulled by the emotional strains of global crises. As she attempts to balance her responsibilities as a mother, sister, and wife, Lizzie's inner angst grows, echoing a broader cultural sense of uncertainty. Offill's use of terse, fragmented prose reflects the staccato rhythm of modern thought, deftly capturing the tension of the present moment. Critics have praised the novel for its quiet intensity and emotional precision. Kate Clanchy for example, described it as "a dazzling response to the climate crisis and political anxiety," emphasizing its profound connection to the shared experience of living through tempestuous times (Clanchy, 2020).

By offering an insightful insights into the psychological effects of crises, Offill explores how the fear of disasters is exacerbated when individuals face threats that seem beyond their control and are inherently unjust. This lack of agency exacerbates the fear of unforeseen catastrophes (Politics and Prose, 2020). Furthermore, her critique of mainstream climate change strategies reflects a concern that individuals are encouraged to make superficial changes, such as installing energy-efficient light bulbs or improving the eco-efficiency of their homes, while more fundamental structural issues that contribute to environmental damage are ignored. However, Offill points out the disturbing fact that some of these initiatives have been influenced by corporate climate denial (Politics and Prose, 2020). Through these thoughts, Offill exposes the illusion of individual mechanism, claiming that "the idea that individual actions can protect us from disaster - 'If I do this, I won't die' - is a myth." She concludes by emphasizing that "true changed throughout history have not come from individual efforts, but from collective action" (Politics and Prose, 2020).

Offill's narrative style, based on short snapshots and fragmented passages, that captures the fragmented nature of contemporary life, distinguished by a constant flow of information amidst increasing emotional turmoil. Eric Haag notes that Offill's short stories create "cumulative awareness and incremental understanding," reflecting the depth of human experience (Hage, 2020). Offill declares that her writing style, characterized by "short paragraphs and intentional gaps," seeks to present a dual perspectives. For example, regarding climate change, we oscillate between imagining catastrophic scenarios—such as New York City subway stations flooding—and engaging with the details of everyday life, such as picking up aluminum foil or picking up children from school (Politics and Prose, 2020). This juxtaposition of daily routines and catastrophic situations enhances the novel's emotional impact and increases the reader's engagement with it.

The novel correspondingly draws inspiration from Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial*, with Offill saying, "While writing this novel, I found inspiration in Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial*, which discusses how we avoid confronting suffering and atrocities, a central theme of *Weather*" (Politics and Prose, 2020). Through Lizzie's role as a researcher on her mentor Sylvia's climate podcast, the novel addresses issues of ecological collapse and resilience. Leslie Jamieson notes that Offill successfully depicts "the intertwining of the details of everyday life and global crises," making *Weather* a profound meditation on the interconnectedness of the personal and global dimensions of contemporary life (Jamieson, 2020). Lizzie's struggles with her recovering brother and family tensions intersect with broader issues such as political instability, highlighting the contrast between awareness of challenges and reluctance to confront them.

Offill's treatment of existential obsessions is linked to her view of the nature of writers. She explains, "Writers often grapple with issues of death and uncertainty. In contrast, those who face life without a death anxiety rarely become writers; they see risks as rare possibilities, not inevitabilities" (Politics and Prose, 2020). This existential perspective is perfected by the novel's sense of humor, as Lizzie's reflections blend sarcasm with anxiety. Her questions, such as, "What's the point of trying to improve things if everything is falling apart?" and her biting observations, such as, "You can't change the world without getting up in the morning," embody the struggle between hope and despair and highlight the strength of will in the face of challenges.

The autofictional elements in *Weather* deepen its emotional impact, blurring the lines between autobiography and fiction. Kate Clanchy notes that *Weather* goes beyond the limits of the conventional novel form, demonstrating a direct extension of Jenny Offill's style which is sharply thoughtful and deeply emotional (Clanchy, 2020). This distinctive style brings Offill closer to other contemporary writers such as Karl Ove Knausgaard and Rachel Cusk who also use fragmented structures and reflective tones to explore personal and social themes in creative ways. Through the representation of Lizzie's fragmented awareness, Offill infuses the narrative with a sense of immediacy and subtle cohesion, engaging readers in a constructing meaning from scattered moments, much like assembling a mosaic. The fragmented structure of the novel reflects the turmoil of modern life depicting a world filled with constant turmoil where brief flashes of humor exist alongside a constant and disturbing awareness of universal uncertainty.

Blending the personal with the societal, Jenny Offill's *Weather* is a powerful example of autofiction that captures the complexities of a world in tension. The fragmented form of the novel captures the instability of the contemporary life balancing chaos with fleeting wonder. Offill navigates between individual self-reflection and collective anxiety that offers an intimate and universally resonant narrative. As Jamieson (2020) notes that the book emotionally reflects the paradox of imagining the future at a time when the present seems uncertain and fragile. Through this approach, Offill encourages readers to confront their own personal anxieties and societal responsibilities, demonstrating profound reflections to the quest for meaning amidst disorder.

### **3.2. The Autofictional Elements in Jenny Offill's *Weather***

*Weather* by Jenny Offill, opens with a fragmented, reflexive narrative style that groups the tone for its autofictional narrative. The writer conveys her inner turmoil and emotional state through a metaphor inspired by Japanese culture, stating "This stage can be described only by a Japanese word: 'Bucket of black paint.'" (Offill, 2020, p. 1). This vivid image mirrors the depth of her psychological distress, the complication of human emotions, and aligns with the genre's focus on personal experience, allowing readers to relate to her struggles in a poignant and vivid way.

The narrator's confession: "Sometimes I slip up and allow myself for a moment to think of what is wrong with Henry" (Offill, 2020, p. 72) highlights familial tension and emotional fragility, two essential elements of autobiographical fiction. This statement reveals her honesty in addressing her relationships, lending a realistic tone to her reflections. Similarly, her statement: "My brain feels scraped" (Offill, 2020, p. 65) expresses psychological exhaustion, highlighting her inner conflicts. These candid moments form the core of the confessional style that characterizes autofiction.

Offill also uses humor and wit to critique societal standards. For example, the narrator asks, “Why are people on reality shows always setting their intentions? Is that like prayer for pharmaceutical reps?” (Offill, 2020, p. 70), blending irony with critical reflection on contemporary culture. This perspective gives her the ability to delve into societal issues with sharp intelligence. At the same time, the reflective line, “It is important to remember that emotional pain comes in waves. Remind yourself that there will be a pause between the waves.” (Offill, 2020, p. 71), reflects the idea of resilience, offering insights into how to deal with challenges of life.

The narrator's existential musings are a pivotal aspect of the novel. For example, the quote, “Young person worry: What if nothing I do matters? Old person worry: What if everything I do does?” (Offill, 2020, p. 9), captures the ironies of life with a humorous edge. Similarly, she expresses her fears about the acceleration of time, saying, “My # 1 fear is the acceleration of days. No such thing supposedly, but I swear I can feel it.” (Offill, 2020, p. 8). These moments connect personal obsessions with a general existential angst, enhancing their impact on the reader.

Even in moments of humor, existential anxiety remains present, as evidenced by her comment, “The work is going well, but it looks like it might be the end of the world.” (Offill, 2020, p. 35). This juxtaposition of humor and crisis reflects the dualities that define the narrator's life. Similarly, her reflection, in the sentence, “You have to ask. It's almost summer and he's getting scared. How will he see her?” (Offill, 2020, p. 31), expresses the personal challenges in her relationships, adding emotional depth to her experiences.

Offill often focuses on small, simple victories as moments of significance, as seen in “There is a heroic tower of folded things on the table.” (Offill, 2020, p. 5). This appreciation for everyday details contrasts with her broader societal critiques, such as her wry observation, “We've just learned that Kasper is gifted and talented” (Offill, 2020, p. 11), which critiques the obsession with achievement. These interpretations mirror the narrator's intelligence and her deep understanding of the world around her.

The complications of relationships are addressed with humor in the sentence “You don't want to date someone like you, do you?” (Offill, 2020, p. 5), which expresses self-awareness and personal development. Similarly, her truthful admission: “But sometimes I get spooked all over again.” (Offill, 2020, p. 3) demonstrates the emotional dimension of autofiction, as she readily admits her fears and fragility, allowing readers to see her vulnerabilities and path to growth.

Nature is also used as an image to reflect the narrator's inner self, as evidenced by the phrase: “It's the first day of spring, weird clouds, hazy sun” (Offill, 2020, p. 11), which expresses the uncertainty and change in her life. Her tendency to avoid responsibility is demonstrated by the rhetorical question: “What do you think will happen if you don't open the bills? Do you think someone will come and take them away?” (Offill, 2020, p. 34), a question that captures the humor and frustration that characterizes her perspective.

The narrator's philosophical musings enrich the narrative, as exemplified by the statement, “It is only the people who visit the monastery who feel anything. The people in the monastery feel nothing” (Offill, 2020, p. 18) this reflects a reflection on the nature of experience and separation. These reflections are interspersed with moments of absurdity, as in the sentence: “I try to explain that it is not possible for me to know this,

that only he knows this, but he just shakes his head in that indignant way that means, "What kind of help desk is this?" (Offill, 2020, p. 3), highlighting the humor inherent in everyday frustrations.

Even simple statements such as, "I'm just going to wait for dinner" (Offill, 2020, p. 8), encapsulate moments of quiet introspection that characterize the narrator's inner world. However, the existential statement, "The moon will be fine, I think. No one's worrying about the moon." (Offill, 2020, p. 2), reflects the contrast between individual concerns and the limitlessness of the universe, a repetitive theme in autobiographical fiction.

The sentence "So I tell my brother how Ben and I never notice the same things" (Offill, 2020, p. 5), also addresses issues of misunderstanding and differing perspectives, highlighting the challenges of communication and perception. Similarly, the narrator expresses feelings of disconnection and emotional burden by saying, "I've made that mistake after other drops-offs. I should be used to it by now, but sometimes I get spooked all over again" (Offill, 2020, p. 3). These moments underscore the complexity of her relationships.

The narrator's obsession with memory and loss is revealed in, "I've always had an obsession with lost books, all the ones half-written or recovered in pieces" (Offill, 2020, p. 22). This literary reflection connects to themes of impermanence and the passage of time. These themes are further emphasized in, "What will be the safest place? No one they'd consulted with would give them a straight answer" (Offill, 2020, p. 82), which delves into broader cultural anxieties.

Finally, *Weather* interweaves ordinary observations with deep reflections, as evidenced by the passage: "I buy sneakers because I want to run. This street smells of garbage. Turn left for greener streets" (Offill, 2020, p. 15). Even the most usual actions, such as cooking a meal, carry emotional and symbolic weight, "I remember the first time I made him dinner. I took the chicken from the fridge and peeled off the disgusting, filmy wrapper" (Offill, 2020, p. 13). Everyday actions turn into gentle thoughts about who we are and what we have been through.

The embodiment of the essence of autofiction in Offill's novel *Weather* is evident in the intentional blurring of the lines between real-life experience and imaginative storytelling. Through a mix of humor, introspection, and philosophical thoughts the author builds a narrative that feels both personal and multilayered. This style reflects the emotional depth and complexity of modern life making the story resonate on multiple levels.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines the discursive framework of autofiction as a narrative form that challenges and redefines the traditional boundaries between reality and fiction. As a literary genre, autofiction opens up a flexible narrative space that allows authors to construct their identities through creative storytelling and blending personal experience with wider cultural and contemporary anxieties that transcend the realm of individual subjectivity. Through a close reading of Jenny Offill's novel *Weather*, this study explores how intimate concerns are rooted in broader intellectual, social, and political contexts,

including environmental collapse and societal disintegration, all conveyed in a consistent, reflective, and emotionally resonant tone.

Offill's fragmented narrative style and focus on inner consciousness give the novel a formally open character that mirrors the instability and fragmentation of the contemporary world. The analysis also addresses the philosophical underpinnings of autofiction, particularly those shaped by postmodern thought, indicating how the autobiographical fiction has become a vital platform for marginalized voices to resist dominant narratives and assert their presence in literary discourse.

Unlike traditional autobiographical forms, autofiction re-forms real-life experiences through non-linear, often ambiguous narratives characterized by discontinuous chronologies and fluid identities. Going beyond mere documentation, autofiction embraces experimental techniques to interrogate ideas of belonging, memory, and the instable self.

Ultimately, this study represents autofiction as a critical paradigm in modern literature. One that navigates the tension between internal fragmentation and external discontinuity that offers for readers a complex epistemological and aesthetic encounter. By subverting narrative norms and reforming the self, autofiction provides a unique viewpoint for understanding identity, meaning, and existence in a world defined by fragility, acceleration, and symbolic distance.

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