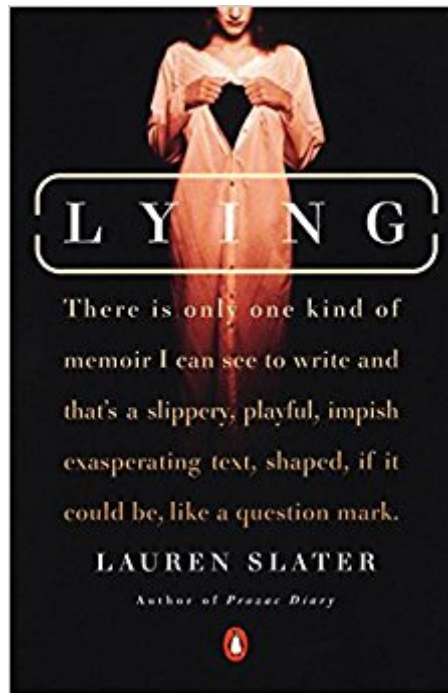




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# Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir



## Synopsis

In this powerful and provocative new memoir, award-winning author Lauren Slater forces readers to redraw the boundary between what we know as fact and what we believe through the creation of our own personal fictions. Mixing memoir with mendacity, Slater examines memories of her youth, when after being diagnosed with a strange illness she developed seizures and neurological disturbances-and the compulsion to lie. Openly questioning the reliability of memoir itself, Slater presents the mesmerizing story of a young woman who discovers not only what plagues her but also what cures her-the birth of her sensuality, her creativity as an artist, and storytelling as an act of healing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One has good reason to be suspicious of a book that calls itself a "metaphorical memoir." If a metaphor substitutes one thing for another to which it's not ordinarily related, and a memoir relates the personal experiences of the author, then a metaphorical memoir would be... well, lying, if we're going to get technical about it. Or it could be Lying, in which case, hold that judgment and lay all categories aside: here is a book so stunningly contrary it deserves a whole genre to itself. Lauren Slater may have grown up with epilepsy. Or she may have Munchausen syndrome, "also called factitious illness," also called lying. Or, quite possibly, she has never had any of the above, and all her exquisite evocations of auras and grand mal seizures are merely well-researched symbolic descriptions of her psychic state. In a chapter that's disguised as an extended letter to her editor

(and impishly titled "How to Market This Book") she defends her decision to call the work nonfiction: Why is what we feel less true than what is? Supposing I simply feel like an epileptic, a spastic person, one with a shivering brain; supposing I have chosen epilepsy because it is the most accurate conduit to convey my psyche to you? Would this not still be a memoir, my memoir? Slater is peering down a slippery slope here, and for all its manifest brilliance, the pyrotechnics of its prose, reading *Lying* can be an unnerving experience--sort of like hanging out with a compulsive liar, actually. (It's no help to find out that "after all, a lot, or at least some, or at least a few, of the literal facts are accurate.") But if Slater is playing with our heads, she's not doing so for fashionable postmodern reasons. *Lying's* bag of tricks emerges from some complex and deeply felt ideas about form, reality, and consciousness itself--and what's more, it's an extraordinary memoir, "true" or not. A field full of nuns, their windblown habits tipping them over into the snow; an electric brain stimulator that makes a patient see colors and taste her own words; Slater rolling in mounds of Barbadian sugar and then running back to her mother, coated like candy--who cares whether any of these actually happened? In the end, *Lying* is fundamentally true, just as a great novel or indeed any great work of art is true: in a way that has nothing to do with fact. --Mary Park --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

If fact is shaded with metaphor, does it become fiction? In a memoir that raises that question, the author of *Prozac Diary* and *Welcome to My Country* narrates a life marked by a disease she may or may not actually have. "I have epilepsy," she writes in the first chapter. "Or I feel I have epilepsy. Or I wish I had epilepsy, so I could find a way of explaining the dirty, spastic glittering place I had in my mother's heart." But was it epilepsy, or depression, or bipolar disorder, or Munchausen syndrome, or none of the above? And did Slater really undergo a corpus callostomy operation separating her right and left brain? Questions of authenticity aside, at its core this memoir touchingly describes the coming of age of a young girl who relies on illness to gain the attention of her narcissistic mother and ineffectual father, and who must find a way to navigate her parents' often vicious marriage and her own troubled adolescence. Slater, who says she must take anticonvulsant medication daily, had her first seizure the summer she turned 10. The symptoms of epilepsy function as a vehicle for her most potently written passages: dazzling hallucinations, teeth-grinding spasms, exuberant exaggerations. As often happens to those with illness, Slater moves from diagnosis to misdiagnosis to cure to redefinition and eventually to acceptance. In her afterword, the author explains that for personal and philosophical reasons, she had no choice but to transcribe her life in "a slippery, playful, impish, exasperating text, shaped, if it could be, like a question mark." The skill with which

she achieves her goal reflects unusual insight. Agent, Kim Witherspoon. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Lauren Slater is a wonderful writer. This is the most ambiguous text I have ever read. It is so interesting because there are so many things to question. The truth, fact, non fact, and non truth are definitely always questionable throughout the novel. She puts a unique twist on the perception of life and the way she views different situations that have occurred within her life. This is one of my favorite books I have ever read. I would recommend this book to anyone. It is so easy to read and views the world so differently. Great book!! Also I don't think she ever had epilepsy, but that of course is just my opinion.

In "The Art of Time in Memoir", Sven Birkerts wrote that memoirs are works of restoration, "searching out recurrences and patterns, but also then allowing for the idea that pattern hints at a larger order . . . the memoirist researches this, using the self as subject, assembling the shards, riveting his impressions together word by word." This idea is perhaps vital in reading Lauren Slater's "Lying", for she openly admits to creating or altering the stories she tells about herself. There is the lie of Hayward Krieger, whom the introduction is credited to - yet Slater's Dr. Neu claims that Krieger does not exist. Does Dr. Neu exist, or is he another fabrication? Similar questions continue throughout the reading. Slater is not a memoirist who we can consider a reliable narrator, but that factual accuracy was never the point. To read Slater's novel is to feel as though you are experiencing the confusions and frustrations that she felt in her life. Slater's style is experimental and effective. The first chapter is a single sentence: "I exaggerate." She chose to include letters and medical reports along with the narrative, giving us a look at her as perceived by others in her life. In this writing itself, Lying is effective in its use of imagery to pull in the reader, and Slater's writing and identity are persuasive and compelling. A scene standing out in my mind was her watching people on the bus. When they got up, she "sat in their seats and felt the way the foam cushions had molded to their specific shapes", she smelled an old man's hat and "studied the hair carefully . . . two silver strands of hair, with a masculine smell." Slater's ears pop and she feels cool air coming in through the bus window, and in this moment we are Lauren. She is honest about things that someone would not necessarily permit herself to be honest about. For instance, the contemplation about stealing babies, lying about having cancer, and having "an immediate affinity for [the penis]." It does not matter so much if Slater's memoir is the truth in its entirety. It is her truth. We have been introduced to her life and her character. From what she has presented to us as readers, we are able

to use this to interpret who she is. She states that she has given us her essence. Perhaps in a way, the candid admission that this memoir consists of lies makes her more honest than memoirists that embellish their truths (for instance, could Conroy truly have remember every intimate detail and conversation in "Stop-Time"?). Slater urges that the metaphors she uses "resonate in a heartfelt place we cannot dismiss", and that is the goal of her postmodern memoir. Truth can be complex, and Slater masterfully explores this idea. This book is engaging and undoubtedly one of my favorite memoirs.

Lauren Slater's book, *Lying*, may very well be a work of genius. It is beautifully written and existentially profound. Anyone trying to understand his or her own complex behavior, or such behavior of a friend or loved one, will be engaged, encouraged, embraced by this book. If your experience has been such that you still struggle to find words capable of expressing the truth of your experience, this book may be a revelation. If your heart and mind has brought you to discovering this book through interests noted by the algorithm - trust it in this case, and purchase a copy. Really.

"*Lying*" takes the reader on a fantastical journey through a mind disturbed by epilepsy or maybe something else. The author experiments successfully not only with the concept of truth but point of view in telling the story. The author's syntax and vocabulary is straight-forward, which lets the narrative stand out. However, she also plays with style, as when she crafts the report of a doctor doing research on epilepsy. The reader also gets an education about epilepsy, Munchausen syndrome and Alcoholics Anonymous.

So she admits her epilepsy is a metaphor. I was okay with that. The metaphor is her truth. Still, her mother is too absent later in the book; concrete memories are absent too, and the focus is on disease only. This book is worth the read. Is it memoir? I think so. I forgive Slater her lies because she has honestly told us she's a liar -- over and over-- in her book.

Although impeccably written I wish I have not been 'tricked' into believing her story. In the other hand it shows her incredible ability to sound truthful. It also teaches us that autobiographical work could reflect any amount of 'lies'...for whatever reason or cause, and in varied intensity.

I was fooled by all the five star reviews and bought the book. She is an unusually good writer, but

she's a nut!

holy moly...this is a good book! quick read and smart.

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