



## Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir

By Lauren Slater

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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.

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## **Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir** By Lauren Slater Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

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*

#### From Publishers Weekly

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)

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From [Booklist](#)

Slater, author of *Prozac Diary* (1998), marshals her literary virtuosity and dual perspective as a psychologist who has suffered mental disorders in this highly provocative inquiry into the nature of epilepsy. She describes her own epileptic seizures with poetic intensity, then declares that "some epileptics are liars," and, indeed, many episodes feel more dramatized than documented. She lyrically recounts her spiritual awakening at a special school for epileptics run by nuns only to slyly observe that epileptics often harbor religious fixations. Slater then suggests that she actually had Munchausen syndrome, which induces sufferers to feign illnesses. Did she have an operation to separate the hemispheres of her brain, or is that a metaphor for her divided sense of self? Each anecdote is as enrapturing and disorienting as the auras, or "strange states," she experiences just before her seizures, and all are inspired by the same overarching question: Why is what we feel less true than what is? Slater's uncanny narrative subtly reveals the meshing of the factual with the emotional and the real with the imagined. *Donna Seaman*

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