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The Slippery Self: Intertextuality in Lauren Slater's *Lying*

Introduction

In the introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay,* Phillip Lopate writes, "What is the stylistic function of quotation in the personal essay? One obvious answer would seem to be to lend authority to the author's argument" and the other, to allow readers the "pleasure of knowing that we are in cultivated hands, attending to a well-stocked, liberally educated mind" (xli). Simply put, according to Lopate, quotation supports what the writer is saying and lets us know they are educated enough to "graciously inform" us (xlii). From the arguable father of the personal essay form, Michel de Montaigne, to current authors Maggie Nelson and David Shields, as well as innumerable others, quotation has become one of the most common craft choices for writers of creative nonfiction. But I posit that Lopate's assessment is much too simple of a rendering: the inclusion of quotation and other intertextual figures within a nonfiction text can do more than simply demonstrate a certain type of authorial voice or add external credibility. Using intertextuality, specifically within creative nonfiction, can invite readers into an investigation of the unstable nature of language and meaning.

All texts, by definition, are intertextual. However, some texts actively participate in making their audience aware of their status as *inter*textual. Many nonfiction authors, especially those who write self-as-subject creative nonfiction, make the craft decision to use "intertextual transactions" or "intertextual figures," specific literary moves that raise audience awareness of the presence of intertextuality. According to Robert S. Miola, these features include, but are not limited to: revision, translation, quotation, allusion,

source text, conventions and configurations, genres, and cultural discourses (14-23). While each of these craft choices varies in the unique way it presents itself within a text, they are all signs an author can use that reminds readers of the way a text is actively speaking to and interacting with another.

Viewed through a critical lens, the choice to include any of these intertextual figures illustrates how all texts are threaded with other texts, that the meaning of a piece of writing, rather than being singular and determined by the author, is wrapped up in a chain of signification that accomplishes "the very plural of meaning" (Barthes 159). While this perpetually deferred and plural meaning is true of all genres, intertextuality has particular significance in creative nonfiction. As the self, the authorial I, is the primary subject being interrogated in much of personal creative nonfiction, specifically within the forms of essay and memoir, the nature of the text focuses a reader's attention squarely on this self as represented in the text: simply put, if a nonfiction text's inherent intertextuality asks readers to think about the plurality of meanings that the text and its subject can have, drawing attention to this: intertexuality can be used to demonstrate the plurality of the self from which readers are trying to glean this meaning. Rather than painting the self as a single cohesive figure, the *text as intertextual* questions our readerly assumptions about the stable and singular nature of the self, a project that helps to serve the overall aims of self-as-subject creative nonfiction.

Lauren Slater's *Lying* is one self-as-subject creative nonfiction project that makes frequent use of these intertextual figures. A self-identified "metaphorical memoir," *Lying* chronicles the narrator's growth from childhood to adulthood looking at her experience as an individual who may or may not have epilepsy. The book has been controversial for the way Slater "exaggerates" the events of her life, including the fact that she may or may not have even been diagnosed with epilepsy, while disclosing this possible (and even probable) untruth to her readers along the way. This question of veracity is so central to the memoir that the entire first chapter of *Lying* consists only of the sentence "I exaggerate," a claim that Slater investigates in detail throughout, perpetually reminding the reader that events as they are recounted may or may not

have happened (5). While the question of whether or not Slater actually was diagnosed with epilepsy and the ethical implications of possibly falsifying that information in a memoir have been widely discussed, on page 5, Slater writes

> I have epilepsy. 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. Epilepsy is a fascinating disease because some epileptics are liars, exaggerators, makers of myths and high-flying stories… I don't know where this is my mother or where this is my illness, or whether, like her, I am just confusing fact with fiction, and there is no epilepsy, just a clenched metaphor, a way of telling you what I have to tell you: my tale,

a statement that, along with her title: *Lying,* clues readers into the possibility that her illness may be falsified (5-6).

One of the most integral craft choices Slater makes is the use of intertextual figures such as references to scholarly journal articles, allusions to other literary works, and even large excerpts from other academic texts that appear to be copied and pasted into her memoir. Slater frequently references and alludes to other texts and writers such as Jayne Anne Phillips' *Black Tickets*, Leonard Kriegel, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and a Paul Tillich text that her AA group discusses once a week, all texts and writers that make up her larger experience in the world (112; 58; 163; 213; 196). Much like the way intertextual figures function elsewhere, these figures can remind readers that all texts are formed from an author's encounter with other outside texts, that the meaning of any work is always ever plural and created through the complex interactions between readers and the work. But unlike other literary works, many of Slater's intertextual features do not refer to works that exist outside of Slater's pages, a move that does not diminish the effects, but highlights them instead.

Intertextuality and the Project of Self-as-Subject Creative Nonfiction

It is one thing to interrogate the veracity of Slater's memoir, both in the events that she presents about her life as well as her use of potentially falsified intertextual figures in order to determine whether Slater is simply pulling a fast one over her readers, but it is another thing entirely to think about what this does for Slater as a writer of memoir: what does the craft move of including intertexts that exist and don't exist outside of the memoir do for the construction of the work itself? How does it aid or detract from Slater's investigation, from the project of memoir as a whole?

One of the possible implications of intertextuality as a craft choice for nonfiction writers is the removal of the illusion of a singular voice from any given text. Since texts are all intertextual, borrowing voices consciously and unconsciously, the same readerly impulse that makes us think that there is a signified behind a signifier, a direct relationship between what we see on the page of the text and what lies outside of it, also leads us to believe that a text is a singular voice that comes from a singular subject. This is of particular interest within the genre of the self-as-subject creative nonfiction as the "I" voice is often more prevalent and scrutinized than in other genres of creative writing as one of the goals of this genre is "intimacy" and "self-disclosure" (Lopate xxiii, xxiv).

But what the genre does not typically scrutinize within these definitions is the weighty assumption that there is a singular self to disclose. Rather than emphasizing a singular subject, and in the case of creative nonfiction, a singular self, the theory of intertextuality roots this out as a false notion. Kristeva writes that "(intertextuality) can be a once a melancholic moment of crisis, a loss of voice and meaning, a void and displaced origin, and a rebellious conquest of a new polymorphous expression against any unproductive identity or totalitarian linearity" (9). As the origin of a text is presumed to be the author, especially within the genres of the memoir and personal essay in where the author is the primary subject of the text, the use of intertextuality can destabilize this idea. Phrased positively, this unseating of the singular self and authoritative voice of the author/subject results in "a *subject in process/on trial,* that unstable articulation of identity and loss leading to a new and plural identity" (9). With intertextuality, the

subject/author of any work of self-as-subject creative nonfiction can enact the ways that their identity is infinitely plural.

This plurality of identity, while found within the idea of intertextual theory and, by extension, implicitly in every type of writing, is explicitly a part of Slater's larger thematic concerns in *Lying*. From the beginning of the memoir, Slater presents an idea of self that is not singular in mind. As the narrator is laying down the premise for her investigation, Slater writes, "I have epilepsy. Or I feel I have epilepsy. Or I wish I had epilepsy" and later, when she is about to have surgery, she writes, "I had always believed there could be two truths, truth A and truth B, but in my mind truth A sat on top of truth B, or vice versa. In this instance, however, I had epilepsy, truth A, and I had faked epilepsy, truth B, and A and B were placed in a parallel position" (5; 93-94).

While this question about whether the narrator has epilepsy is one of the main questions of the memoir, it goes beyond a question about mere adherence to the facts of her specific medical and mental condition. Instead, this is a concern about the narrator's ideas of self: is she, in identity, a person with epilepsy or not? The answer that the book maintains is that she is both truths A and truth B at the same time, something that demonstrates a divided or multitudinous concept of self. This plural-voiced self stands out, as this determination, what is true/not true of the narrator's self, is one of the primary investigations of the work. When speaking at an AA meeting, watching the reactions of those in the room, the narrator muses, "it wasn't what I was saying, but how I was saying it, my voice so genuine, so painful, so utterly absolutely authentic, and it was! It was! It wasn't!", the narrator asserting that it is both her voice and not her voice issuing from her mouth, a kind of literal recognition of her own double-voiced discourse (206).

The Corpus Collostomy and False Intertexts

Reading *Lying* as a metaphorical memoir, the corpus collostomy is an interesting event within the narrative to parse. The procedure, literally splitting the two halves of the narrator's brain, if not factually accurate in the sense that this procedure happened to the writer Lauren Slater, serves also to speak to the nature of the divided or multiple self. Following the procedure in the events of the memoir, the idea of the narrator's internal division comes up several times. After the narrator sleeps with author Christopher Martin at the writing conference, she states, "In my brain there was a gap where Dr. Neu had separated the sides, and in my body there was a gap, a barely stitched together rip, and all you had to do was press its seams and it would split," speaking to a sense of separation in how the narrator understands herself—divided in both her mind and body (131). This idea of splitness returns at the end of the memoir as well. The narrator ruminates about her life and the story she has told: "if it is not my fault, if I cannot even claim my own faults, the splits in the center of my skull, then I really have given myself away" (215). While speaking about splitness leads the reader to remember the corpus collostomy, the division of one half of her brain from another, the narrator's purpose seems to extend far beyond the (possible) literal procedure. There is a divided and multiple sense to the self within Slater's work, a division that, by the end of the memoir, she posits that she must claim. This concern for the awareness (and acceptance) of the multiple nature of the self means that Slater's use of false intertextuality is not meant only to frustrate or deceive readers. By making readers aware of the implications of intertextuality through using false intertextual figures, that there is no true origin, no stable and singular meaning or subject from which we can find our solution/answer, Slater constantly reaffirms this: there is no single self, or rather, the self is a slippery and multitudinous sort of thing.

Slater's craft choice to create false intertextual features serves the personal investigation of the memoir but also helps readers engage in the aim of self-as-subject creative nonfiction more broadly. This falsification is merely an extreme example of the ways that quotation and other intertextual features can operate in these works of nonfiction even when their referents exist outside of the page. Of the purpose

of the personal essay, Lopate writes, "the essay does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive construction. It revolts above all against the doctrine—deeply rooted since Plato—that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy, against the ancient injustice toward the transitory" (xliii). Much like Lopate asserts, Slater's memoir dwells in the realm of the changing and transitory, rejecting the closed notions that readers would want to bring to and take from the text. This engagement, not just with the self but with the reader as well, is also a part of creative nonfiction as a genre. Lopate continues, "there is a certain strictness, or even cruelty at times, in the impulse of the personal essayist to scrape away illusions," and later, "the idea is to implicate first oneself and then the reader in a fault that seems initially to belong safely elsewhere" (xxvi, xxxi). And this is what Slater's memoir does as well. In scraping away the illusion of a stable signified behind the signifier of the text, both meaning behind the text and singular self behind the "I" voice, Slater first implicates herself, asking these questions about identity and truth. But by using false intertextuality, Slater's memoir and investigation do not stay on the pages of the work, but actively pull the reader in, showing them their own assumptions about texts, about selves, about what it is like to live and move in the world, a craft choice that tries its hardest to make sure readers are not merely receiving the text, but active in the process of constructing both the text and its meaning.

When she first introduces Dr. Neu, the narrator refers to an article that he has written: "(Dr. Neu) was my new doctor at Beth Israel, my brilliant neurologist who had published many articles, one of which I will include later in this book" (74). Like the narrator asserts, she does include the study later on in the book, a journal article co-written by Dr. Carlos Neu, M.D., and Patricia Robinson, P.T. (Slater 98). The paper entitled "The Biopsychosocial Consequences of a Corpus Callostomy in the Pediatric Patient" discusses epilepsy "as both a seizure *and* a personality disorder" and goes on to discuss the narrator's specific case of epilepsy, including the results of the narrator's corpus callosotomy, the procedure in which a patient's corpus callosum is severed, separating the left and right hemispheres of the brain from one another. Similarly to the ways the narrator uses the previous references to scholarly intertexts, the inclusion

of Neu and Robinson's article as an intertext is an action the narrator seems to take to lend validity to the story she is telling her readers about her illness.

The scholarly article included in the book presents a complex picture of the narrator, one that includes a level of external awareness of her behavior and condition that we as readers have not seen up to this point. Neu and Robinson start from the premise that epilepsy is a complicated condition with anatomical and psychological elements to it, both a seizure and a personality disorder, something that has not been specified by Slater before this point. Through the article, Neu and Robinson discuss the various outworkings of the narrator's epilepsy. They write

> during her inpatient preoperative workups, nurses observed the patient taking hospital paraphernalia; when confronted, the patient vociferously denied. In addition, the nursing and the surgical team suspected that this patient, while suffering from a severe illness in its own right, was also able to engage in psychosomatic seizure activity, and thereby gain the attention she seemed to crave. (101)

This intertextual information does several things for readers. On one count, we can see the narrator's limited perspective as a character within her memoir. Previous to this, the narrator described stealing from hospitals and even initiating her own seizures, but was unaware (or did not articulate to readers) that this behavior was observed and closely monitored by Dr. Neu. By delivering this information to readers via the intertext, Slater is allowing us to see how including other voices makes a more fully fleshed out narrative, revealing her narrator's blind spots and subjectivity in telling her own story. While the inclusion of this intertextual figure gives readers more reason to question the narrator's perspective, it also adds authority to her overall diagnosis.

In the article, when talking about the narrator's psychosomatic seizure activity, Neu and Robinson write that the narrator was able to create these seizures "while suffering from a severe illness in its own right," a phrase that makes readers believe that she does in fact have epilepsy, and that her epilepsy, as a

psychological disorder as well as a physical one, could explain the inaccuracies and lies that readers have seen up to this point in the book (101). Finally, this particular figure starts readers down the chain of intertextual signification. Slater's book, *Lying,* makes clear its intertextual relationship with Neu and Robinson's article, which references other texts outside of itself: important studies in the field of neuroscience such as those conducted by Geschwind, Bear, Sperry, and DiAngelo (Slater 99). By including a text that references and alludes to other texts, that also reference other texts, Slater begins to show us the complicated web of intertextual signification, something that grows in importance throughout the rest of the book.

Intertextuality and the Stereophony

Regardless of an author's intentions to approach their subject matter with veracity, approaching a piece of writing through the lens of intertextuality shows us how looking to a nonfiction text in order to find a true and singular meaning determined by the author is problematic. Just because the events recounted in *Lying* were experienced by Lauren Slater doesn't mean that she has the sole authority in determining what these events, or her memoir more broadly, is supposed to mean. The intertextual nature of all texts has two implications for determining any work's meaning. In the first count, rather than viewing meaning as something instilled by the author that the reader is meant to find, many theorists, such as Kristeva, have implied that the meaning of a text is produced but an interaction between the text and the reader (Allen 34). No longer is reading self-as-subject nonfiction a passive activity in which someone merely gazes into the written life and experience of another person, but it is instead an active one, where readers are asked to step into "an explosive, infinite and yet always already deferred dimension of meaning" where they are the chief agents of participating in this meaning-making (Allen 65).

In *Lying,* Slater uses a variety of intertextual figures that show how the account the narrator gives is reliant on a complex web of other texts. Some of the allusional intertextual figures Slater uses appear to be

intertextual in the way the text is referencing an individual who has simply read texts, giving us an accurate representation of the "I" as character. Slater mentions the Bible, Sartre, Lewis Carroll and his famous character Alice off-handedly within the narrative, with little apparent intertextual purpose other than giving us a sense of the authorial voice, someone who has read and is familiar with the texts to which she alludes (197, 214, 216).

Toward the end of her memoir, Slater gives her readers one of her most easily recognizable false intertexts: "'How do you change?'" Slater quotes Jesus as saying to his disciples. "'You change by changing'" (197). This passage, identifiable to those familiar with the Bible or the gospels as something that Jesus did not say, makes readers aware of the assumptions they bring to reading. Intertextuality means coming to a text with the assumption that all texts "are made out of our cultural and ideological norms; out of the conventions of the genre; out of styles and idioms embedded in the language; out of connotations and collocative sets; out of cliches, formulae, or proverbs; and out of other texts" (45). Michael Worton and Judith Still add, "the theory of intertextuality insists that a text… cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system" (1). Furthermore, Worton and Still write, "the writer is a reader of texts… before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind," meaning that every writer is immersed in a language and culture that will consequently materialize in their writing (1). Similarly, discussing the role of the reader in an intertextual exchange: "a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all which the reader brings to it" (Worton and Still 1-2).

At its core, the interaction between the writer and their textual framework, as well as the reader and their textual framework, reinforces that every form of nonfiction is intertextual. According to Barthes, a text is "woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony" (*Image*—

Music—Text 160). Every text represents not a singular voice, but a woven "stereophony." As a hold-over from structuralist reading, many readers view texts as cohesive units written by singular individuals, a belief that creates a kind of reader impulse within us, one that leads us to search for the "univocal, definitive, determined" meaning within the text. This impulse is even stronger for nonfiction texts that center around a singular author who forms what many writers consider a contract with the reader. Most individuals approaching these texts believe that the author is honoring this contract and trying to tell a true story of their experience to the best of their ability. Unlike in fiction, where it is easier for readers to divorce their experience with the text from the author's intention and open themselves to a variety of potential meanings, this nonfiction contract that asks readers to trust the honesty of the authorial voice can easily lead readers to believe in the absolute authority of that authorial voice to guide and determine the meaning of their work.

If the text itself, as well as all social, cultural, and historical intertexts, are unstable, and the writer and reader are also unstable as they are subject to their own intertextual thinking, it's clear that meaning itself is not stable or singular either. Barthes writes, "the text is radically plural because of the force of writing seen in its differential sense. That is, it is plural not in the sense of having 'several meanings' but in terms of its accomplishment of 'the very plural of meaning'" (Barthes, *Image — Music — Text* 159). The text opens itself up not simply to any true or correct reading of the meaning, but to every reading of its meaning.

Intertextuality insures us that meaning, created between reader and text, is one of a myriad of potential meanings. Slater references and alludes to other texts to give a sense, like Lopate mentions, of authority behind the claims she is making. In discussing the way she learned to fall in order to protect herself when experiencing a seizure, Slater writes about reading a book by William James that discusses the two different types of will a person can have: a "work hard kind of will" and a "*willingness* instead of a willfulness, an ability to take life of life's terms as opposed to putting up a big fight," concluding that it is

the second type of will that "you need in order to learn to fall" (53). In this way, Slater apparently is using an outside voice to affirm her personal analysis of what it takes to learn acceptance as a response to her seizure.

Intertextuality "place(s) us, readers, not only in front of a more or less complicated and interwoven structure, but also within an on-going process of signifying that goes all the way back to the semiotic plurality, under several layers of the significant" (Kristeva 9). Following each text and being aware of the possible intertexts involved, the reader engages in a chain of ever-deferred meaning. For any work of nonfiction, there is no set and stable meaning that is determined by a single author, or even a single reader, but an awareness that "meaning is not a unity that comes before or after the text, but an irruption, an always unstable revelation on a more or less undermined ground embedded in a plural unity" (Kristeva 11). The very notion of a single meaning as well as a single voice that can communicate meaning, a single subject behind the words on a page, even if they are rooted in a single author writing about their experience, becomes unmoored.

And yet, some of Slater's intertexts are constructed specifically to anchor the reader: one of the most prominent is Slater's use of outside texts to give medical credence to the claims she is making about her childhood epilepsy, a claim that she also undermines several times throughout the book. At one point, the narrator-Slater references other books that the author-Slater has written to justify claims she is making about her mental illness. Slater writes, "maybe I was becoming mentally ill. If you've read my other books—and I have written other books, *Prozac Diary* and *Welcome to My Country,* which I suggest you rush out and buy—you would know that mental problems have been issues throughout my life" (81). In this way, Slater uses an intertextual figure, referencing another, outside text (albeit one that she has written), to prove to the audience that there is a very real possibility that her interactions and ideas originate from some sort of mental illness. Similarly, Slater employs a related move when she posits the idea that she may have Munchausen's disease. For the reader, she includes three excerpts from scholarly articles, from the

journals *The British Journal of Psychiatry, The Journal of Existential Psychiatry,* and *The Annals of Psychiatry* to convince her reader of the possibility that the child-narrator may have also suffered from Munchausen's disease in the same way as those individuals referenced in the excerpts (Slater 88-90). She even ends this discussion with the phrase "Well, that should prove my point," explicitly telling the reader the way she believes these intertextual figures will lend authority to her argument (91).

The inclusion of intertextual figures within *Lying* does all of the things many associate with the theoretical analysis of intertextuality. By handing readers a text rife with other voices, Slater gives out a set of building blocks for a critical analysis of the nature of texts. Readers can see the ways we culturally use intertexts as a validation of authority, and, if prompted, we could follow these texts down to their intertexts and then to their intertexts until we arrive at the awareness of the infinitely deferred origin and the inevitable plurality of meaning, the instability of the author as the seat of authority and a singular subject. But for most readers, the presence of these intertextual figures will not result in a critical evaluation of the intertextual nature of all texts, the implications this has for reading and writing and moving in the world. Most readers of Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts,* a memoir that is filled with quotations and references to other texts in the margins, don't look further into these citations past their use to show the beautiful and complex web of criticism that speaks to and informs Nelson's experience of queer family-building. Encountering texts with evident intertexts is a part of our regular cultural reading, so much so, we are not always aware of the significance of an intertextual world.

That is why what Slater does within her memoir is so powerful. While her text functions like all texts, weaving a hidden trail of intertexts that ultimately deconstruct the meaning of what is being written, she makes readers more aware of this deconstruction by falsifying some of her intertextual figures, and consequently, her intertexts. It is this craft decision that starts to bring reader awareness to the complicated nature of all intertextuality.

The Construction of False Intertexts

While Slater is not as explicit about the false nature of some of these intertexts as she is about the questionable veracity of other aspects of her memoir, she leaves clues for her readers within the text to help identify them as such. When Slater lists the article excerpts about Munchausen's disease, the first two are relatively unsuspicious, discussing a woman who pretends to have cancer and another about a man who pretends to suffer from skin lesions (88-89). But the third excerpt that Slater selects, supposedly from the 98th volume of *The Annals of Psychiatry,* discusses an adolescent girl. The excerpt states,

> This girl had absolutely no physiological evidence of any epileptic activity. On the one hand, she rather masterfully succeeded in convincing people that she suffered from temporal lobe seizures, to the point where she wrote and published an account of her illness… this young girl, for instance, admitted to exaggerating some of her epileptic seizures, but she maintained the baseline veracity of her disorder. (Slater 90-91)

This excerpt seems to mirror the narrator's own story, especially when referencing the book that this patient published about her illness, a similarity that allows the reader to start to question the nature of the intertexts that Slater is using.

One of the first clues that Slater gives readers about the potential falsity of the Neu and Robinson article can be found in the title of the text itself. Upon reading the article's title, "The Biopsychosocial Consequences of a Corpus Callostomy in the Pediatric Patient," it would not be unreasonable for a curious reader to do an online search of "corpus callostomy," looking to find more information about the procedure from a source other than Slater. What that reader will find, however, is that "corpus callostomy" as it appears in Slater's text, is a misspelling of the term "corpus callosotomy." While it is easy to dismiss this at first as merely a typo in the book's printing, each subsequent use of the word also uses the same misspelling, a notable feature in a book written by a professional author as well as a psychologist. Similarly, there are other issues with the text of the article itself that raise a close reader's awareness of the potential

veracity of this article. Much like the excerpt from *The Annals of Psychiatry,* there is an alerting kind of specificity to the information that Neu and Robinson include about the subject of the study. While this study is evidently about the narrator, an adolescent and epileptic patient of Dr. Neu who receives a corpus callostomy from him, some of the symptoms Neu and Robinson explain as being true of most epileptic patients seem to be oddly specific to the narrator's unique situation. Neu and Robinson write,

> Psychologically speaking, such patients (with a Temporal Lobe Epileptic personality profile) are oftentimes deeply concerned with religious/spiritual issues, display artistic proclivities that include excessive writing and, in some cases, are so prone to fabrications that they themselves are no longer able to determine where fact and fiction meet. (99)

The specificity of this list which includes writing and religious impulse, aspects of Slater's personality that have shown up in other places in the memoir, seems to be a bit individualized to the narrator to really apply to all individuals who have a TLE personality profile, something that can make readers suspicious of the validity of this as a legitimate intertext that exists outside the pages of Slater's memoir.

In addition to making readers suspicious of the Neu and Robinson article itself, Slater makes another craft move to cause readers to think more broadly about their assumptions. In the same study by Neu and Robinson, they describe some of the narrator's TLE symptoms before the corpus callostomy surgery. The article states, "she frequently spoke of a correspondence with a professor of philosophy—a Hayward Kreiger… However, we have been unable to locate or confirm the existence of any Hayward Krieger, which is not surprising, and only further underscores the diagnosis" (101). This mention of Hayward Krieger, a character who is absent from the narrative of the memoir, leads readers to the only other place where his name shows up, the introduction. This paratextual feature (a textual feature that most readers do not associate as belonging to the core text of a work itself) is written by a Hayward Krieger, a professor at the University of Southern California, and discusses his first encounter with Lauren Slater as well as his impressions on the memoir itself. Another quick online search leads to the revelation

that Krieger does not exist. While the memoir is full of untruths, this one hits readers a bit differently because of its status as a paratext. Most readers assume that paratextual features exist outside the logic of a text and are therefore a more trustworthy type of text. By making readers aware of this unconscious belief: that some texts are inherently more trustworthy and less constructed than others, Slater allows readers to think about other texts that are imbued with more authority, namely the scholarly journal articles that she has included throughout.

The proverbial nail on the coffin for the article that describes the corpus callostomy and appears to validate the narrator's claims about her epilepsy comes in an intertextual figure separate from the false intertext itself. When the narrator begins to struggle in college, she goes to a school psychologist to seek help, bringing along the paper written by Neu and Robinson so the psychologist "would get an idea of (her) complexities" (Slater 174). After handing the paper over to the psychologist, he says,

> 'This paper,' he said, 'is not real… there is no way this paper was written by a doctor, or anyone even remotely connected to the medical profession.' He paused. 'There is no such part of the brain,' he said, 'as the temporal amygdalan area. There is no such thing as, 'and he pointed to the second page, eliopathic epilepsy.' he smiled. 'I think you meant to write idiopathic. Is that what you mean?... There is no Dr. Neu anywhere in the world who would perform a corpus callostomy on a patient with TLE. It's just not done.' (Slater 175-6)

Even though the narrator does not internalize these criticisms of the paper, reading them and her psychologist's later "prove it to me" behavior as evidence that he is going to sexually assault her, a belief that causes her to report him to the school and never visit him again, the reader sees validity to the points that the psychologist is making and the Neu and Robinson article further loses credibility.

If readers did not question the status of the intertexts and intertextual figures in the memoir up to this point, the Neu and Robinson paper turns the reader's attention to the fact that the intertextual features might not all exist outside of the pages of the book. Slater's intertextual figures cannot be clearly defined

as operating in one vein or the other, whether they are authoritative references or fictions that she is invented, when Slater accurately quotes Sally McFague's *Models of God* as the epigraph to Chapter 8 and later quotes, within that same chapter, a fictional conversation between Jesus and his disciples: "'How do you change?' Jesus said to his disciples. 'You change by changing'" (197).

On one hand, a quick reading of the intertextual features that lead readers to intertexts that later appear to be false adds to the larger complaints against Slater's veracity. The reader can add to the list of grievances growing against Slater and dismiss the book as a work of fiction. But I would argue that a slower reading and more careful consideration of Slater's use of intertextless-intertextuality is doing more complicated things. By using these features within her writing, Slater is appealing to Michale Riffaterre's "compulsory reader response," providing a space for readers to think critically about intertextuality the assumptions bring to the text and its subject.

One of Riffaterre's contributions to the larger conversations surrounding intertextuality is the effect that the presence of an intertext has on readers. Riffaterre argues that the presence of an intertextual figure within a text makes readers "perceive that something is missing from the text: gaps that need to be filled, references to an as yet unknown referent" and gives them "an urge to understand" that "compels readers to look to the intertext to fill out the text's gaps" (56-57). The intertextual figure, in addition to giving readers the sense that the text is missing something, and that there is a "key to the riddle" of the text in the form of this missing intertext, and points "the way to where the solution must be sought" (58). In this way, a text's visible intertextuality, while theoretically supposed to lead us to understand the lack of authority of the author, the perpetual chain of signification that results in the plural of meaning, usually leads us to the opposite conclusion.

This is why Slater's *Lying* does such work as an intertextual text. Rather than giving her readers a sense of a stable signified beneath the signifier of the intertextual figure, Slater's intertextuality accesses the compulsory reader impulse, only to thwart this impulse when she shows that some of these figures are

not keys to understanding her text further. Instead, readers who follow their intertextual impulse looking for a closed circuit of meaning, find instead a glaring nothingness, a fiction that seems to mock us for our assumptions about reading and the nature of texts: that texts are stable, that there are keys that can unlock the true meaning, that there were solid signifieds behind the signifiers on the page. Even though these are the true implications of all intertextuality, and by extension, all texts, it is Slater's extreme use of false intertexts that can bring this to the forefront of our awareness in our reading of *Lying*. In many ways, Slater's falsification of the intertextual system causes readers to see what other, non-falsified intertexts do for a book, and more specifically, a work of self-as subject creative nonfiction.

Conclusions

While Lopate's discussion of quotation within the personal essay is true, it can be a craft choice that lends authority to a text and gives us a sense of a distinct authorial voice, there are other, arguably more significant, possibilities for quotation: an explicit reference to the intertextuality that makes up all texts, that unmoors meaning, makes it plural, and presents a picture of the origin and self that is not relegated to a singular identity, but is allowed to be inconsistent or multitudinous. Slater's memoir privileges these things and allows readers to confront these ideas, something that is true of the way that creative nonfiction operates as a genre. Even though all texts are by nature, intertextual, and theoretically lead readers to these concepts, it is Slater's extreme use of false intertextual figures, as well as those that point to a signified that exists outside of the page, that makes readers aware of the implications of the way a text is woven together with a multitude of voices. This is not simply to aggravate and trick readers but actively contributes to Slater's larger investigation in the work, trying to pin down truth, meaning, and the self, when none are singular and stable in the way most people assume, as well as the aims of the genre of self-as-subject creative nonfiction.

In his same discussion of the personal essay, Philip Lopate writes, "the personal essayist tries to make his many partial selves dance to the same beat—to unite, through force of voice and style, these discordant, fragmentary personae so that the reader can accept them as issuing from one coherent self," and this is where Lopate and I disagree (xxviv). Slater's memoir does not seek to present a united, coherent self, as this is the kind of self that the reader assumes when they open a work of self-as-subject creative nonfiction, the self behind the prominent "I" in the text. Instead, *Lying* does the opposite, taking the assumption of a singular self, and attempting, *essai*-ing, to show it fragmented, discordant, and true.

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