

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE  
FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY

**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

**No Pain, No Gain**

A Study in Narratives of Suffering

Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster* & Lauren Slater's *Lying*

Vedoucí diplomové práce:

PhDr. Hana Ulmanová, PhD., M.A.

Vypracovala:

Barbora Libovická  
AA – POLT  
Praha, leden 2006

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci **No Pain, No Gain: A Study in Narratives of Suffering: Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster* & Lauren Slater's *Lying*** vypracovala samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.

I declare that the following diploma thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources mentioned.



Barbora Libovická  
Leden, 2006

I wish to express my gratitude to PhDr. Hana Ulmanová, PhD., M.A. for her patient guidance and ceaseless support.

I would also like to thank Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc. for lending me his book *Marie Maclean: Narrative as Performance* for several months.

My thanks also go to Mark Kelly and Ken Machalek for grammar consultations and supportive remarks and to Lukáš Morávek for his critical comments.

Last but not least, I am indebted to my family for standing by me in times of distress.

*"All our creations are waiting to be complemented, improved, and thus corrected."*

*-Sigmund Freud*

*"What is it exactly that Lanzmann, at the outset of the film, finds? He finds, I would suggest, the paths to finding; he finds some further questions which unfold uncannily before him the obscure direction of his pursuit. He finds, especially, the depth and the complexity, the nonsimplicity and the committed interminability involved in the very process of arriving, reaching, finding. The inaugural event of finding is itself already constituted by a number of implied - and incommensurable - discoveries, which the film sets out to explore on different levels."*

*- Shoshana Felman*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

i.	Introduction.....	5
ii.	Introducing the Authors.....	9
1.	Theoretical Background.....	12
1.1.	Defining Postmodern Literature.....	12
1.2.	Narrative as Performance.....	16
1.3.	Trauma in Freud and Caruth.....	20
2.	Form.....	25
2.1.	Title.....	25
2.2.	Genre.....	26
2.3.	Structure.....	30
2.3.1.	Time-shift Narrative.....	30
2.3.2.	Deconstructionist Forays.....	33
2.4.	Point of View.....	35
2.4.1.	Entertaining First-person Narration.....	36
2.4.2.	Multiple Voices and Ears.....	37
2.5.	Style.....	38
2.5.1.	Diction – Old Ellen says it is OK.....	38
2.5.2.	Crisp Poetry in a Pool of Prose.....	40
2.5.3.	Imagery – Starving for Mama.....	42
2.5.4.	Dreaming of Women, Falling for Meaphor.....	47
2.5.5.	Syntax – Loosing Hierarchy, Yet Not One’s Self.....	51
2.5.6.	<i>One Mom One Mom, Chop Chop!</i> .....	53
3.	Relationships.....	55
3.1.	Mothers and Daughters.....	55
3.2.	Mamas & Their Lack – Ellen’s Quest.....	60
3.3.	One Mom, Emptiness and Lauren’s Words.....	67
3.4.	Author versus Reader – Filling the Gaps .....	78
3.5.	Fact, Fiction or Faction?.....	83
4.	Conclusion.....	90
5.	Resumé.....	97
6.	Bibliography.....	103

*"Suffering is."*

*- Buddha's First Noble Truth*

*"I think that for art to become engendered in a person, there has to be some friction somewhere. There has to be a crack for that flower to come up in."  
- Kaye Gibbons*

*"For all you lose, you have an opportunity to gain: closer relationships, more poignant appreciations, clarified values. You are entitled to mourn what you can no longer be, but do not let this mourning obscure your sense of what you can become. You are embarking on a dangerous opportunity. Do not curse your fate; count your possibilities."*

*- Arthur W. Frank*

## **i. INTRODUCTION**

*"The experience of suffering both provokes and resists narration. It is at the heart of many of the world's great stories (the Odyssey, the Book of Job, the Gospels, the Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost) and yet absent, in a fundamental way, from every story. Because intense suffering takes language away, retrospective narration can seem futile, even falsifying. Moreover, it often raises more questions than it answers. (Who or what is responsible for suffering? Is it merited? What ends it? How can it be made commensurable with the rest of one's life? What is its meaning? How does one cope with it?) In spite of all this, sufferers continue to tug at the shirtsleeves of passersby, and passersby continue to stop, listen and fall into the sufferers's story. Why?"<sup>1</sup>*

My opening paragraph is a description of a course that I discovered in the Bard College Course Catalogue for the fall semester 2001 – the year of the falling towers. I was immediately intrigued by the description, having myself experienced great loss, and suffering from it again despite a long passage of time and coping. The course was called *Narratives of Suffering*, drew on literature from the American literary canon, and proved to be very enriching and inspiring. Starting chronologically with short stories of captivity and shipwreck narratives, we later moved onto the fugitive slaves narratives, and proceeded to the life experience of African Americans, Native Americans and various immigrants in the New World. However, it was while reading contemporary American novels that dealt with the loss of a dear one, illness or abuse that I decided to stick with the narratives of suffering in my future thesis.

I chose two contemporary women writers - Kaye Gibbons and Lauren Slater - as my prime focus for the following (simple) reasons: firstly, their books (that is *Ellen Foster* and *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*) not only belonged to the best pieces I have read in the course, but they astonished me! This was particularly due to their playfulness and

humor, in spite of dealing with very sad and grave matters. Secondly, I decided to concentrate on their books because of their thematic similarity – they both deal with childhood trauma, and their heroines are on the quest for – and missing - a loving home. Moreover, both books to some degree reflect the lives of the writers – one being an autobiographical fiction and the other a “*metaphorical memoir*”, thus published as nonfiction. Thirdly, I wish to treat these two authors<sup>2</sup> because of their striking and curious differences in style and technique, in their disclosure of suffering.

Here we get to the most intriguing and most important questions of our enterprise: How does one describe what seems indescribable? How does one express what appears inexpressible? How to share suffering and pain when words are not enough, yet all we have are words? How and through what means does one succeed in getting the message through? What obstacles must one challenge? And is it worth it? Why?

Necessarily, in our attempt to answer these questions, our approach will be interdisciplinary. While mostly working with literary and psychoanalytic theory, we will also touch on theory of language and/or linguistics, applied psychology, and, in the background, ethics. Yet, given the scope of the work and its task, we will leave aside the aspect of gender. In dealing with psychoanalytic theory (in respect to literature), that is, particularly, trauma theory, we will take Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* as our main authority. It is a study in trauma, narrative and history that was recommended to me by Geoffrey Sanborn (my Bard professor of *Narratives of Suffering*), and that has proven of great value in relation to my work. When applying literary theory to the selected novels, and in correspondence with the dominant question of How?, we will focus on the discipline of narratology and make special use of Marie Maclean’s *Narrative as Performance*, a book that has been pointed out and kindly lent to me by professor Martin Procházka.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Bard College Course List: Fall 2001*, May Edition, p.44.

<sup>2</sup> In my thesis, I will use the words “*author*” and “*authoress*” interchangeably.



As to the structure of the thesis, it will consist of an introduction, a theoretical part, and two analytical parts that will consist of several chapters each. In keeping with Ronald Barthes' idea that literary science does not – yet can – exist; but then it will be a science about forms, not contents; we will start out concentrating on the form in our text analysis. We will analyze the organization of the novels, the narrative techniques employed, same as the specific style of the authors. In the second part, we will trace the main relationships of the heroines. As Rob Fisher<sup>3</sup> says, suffering is always about relationships. Illness or pain offers the possibility of a relationship - of human beings helping one another. To the one who suffers, relationships are everything. Thus we can say that suffering is interpersonal or relational. It only turns into real evil when there is nobody to share it with. When one experiences it alone. In the chapters of the second part of the work, we will examine how the portrayal of relationships and their shortcomings or dysfunctionality helps the authors express the suffering of their heroines/own. Focusing on the mother-daughter relationship and its absence, we will attempt to show and explain the necessity and importance of the author-reader relationship; the need to narrate the story of suffering and have somebody to tell it to,<sup>4</sup> as well as the need to read other people's stories of suffering and thus be able to relate with one's pain to the outside world.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to prove that literature – despite all difficulties and seeming impossibility – is capable (perhaps more than any other work of art) of expressing not only suffering, but also trauma; (yet we must admit that the reader will never fully understand the degree of pain experienced unless he/she<sup>5</sup> has lived through something of a similar kind). Moreover, we hope to ascertain that literature has the

---

<sup>3</sup> Fisher, Rob: *Redeeming the Memory of Suffering*, June 2002, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid1/hid1s1.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Lewis characterizes the force behind all good writers as the urgency to communicate and cites Doris Betts words: "*I write because I have stories I don't want to die with.*" Lewis, Nancy: *Kaye Gibbons: Her Full-Time Women*, In: Folks, Jeffrey ed.: *Southern Writers at Century's End*, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997, p.121.

<sup>5</sup> As I deal with women writers and as I consider it generally more appropriate, I tend to use the feminine form only in the following chapters of the thesis.

obligation to keep on doing this. As Harold Schweizer<sup>6</sup> states, literary narrative amounts to the creation of a social space within which suffering can, in all its irresolvable complexities, be articulated, and healing or mourning can take place. In this sense, literature is therapeutic. In its pages the sufferer finds his/her language, and in this language - in the justness and beauty of this language - the legitimacy of his/her own story of suffering.

---

<sup>6</sup> Schweizer, Harold: *The Question of Meaning in Suffering*, June 2002, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid1/hid1s1.htm>. (See this article for an illuminating analysis of the narrative structure of suffering and the concept of meaning in *The Book of Job* and *Franz Kafka's In the Penal Colony*.)

## ii. INTRODUCING THE AUTHORS

**Kaye Gibbons**<sup>7</sup> was born as Bertha Kaye Batts in 1960 in Nash County, North Carolina, and attended North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, studying American and English Literature. She wrote her first novel, *Ellen Foster* (1987), when she was 26 and it was praised as an extraordinary debut.<sup>8</sup> The novel won the Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a Special Citation from the Ernest Hemingway Foundation, the Louis D. Rubin Writing Award, and other major awards. Having become a classic, it is now taught at high schools and universities, often teamed and compared with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,<sup>9</sup> *Catcher in the Rye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Ellen Foster* the heroine is often called a Southern Holden Caulfield.

Her second novel, *A Virtuous Woman*, published in 1989, also received wide praise in the United States and abroad. Both *Ellen Foster* and *A Virtuous Woman* were chosen together as Oprah Book Club selections in 1998, leading The New York Times bestseller list for many weeks. As a result of a grant to write a third novel from the National Endowment for the Arts, Gibbons presented *A Cure for Dreams*, which was published in 1991. This novel won the 1990 PEN/Revson Award for the best work of fiction published by an American writer under thirty-five years of age, as well as the Heartland Prize for fiction from the Chicago Tribune. Her following novels *Charms for the Easy Life* (1993) and

---

<sup>7</sup> She has retained her first husband's last name as her pen name after their divorce, undoubtedly because her first fame, achieved with the publication of her first two novels, occurred during their marriage. DeMarr, Mary Jean: *Kaye Gibbons: A Critical Companion*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003. p.3. Author's introduction is drawn from this book and the following web resources: [www.randomhouse.com/vintage/gibbons/gibbons.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/gibbons/gibbons.html), <http://www.kayegibbons.com/biography.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Eudora Welty wrote to Louis Rubin, the publisher of the book: "What a delight you've let me in for. The life in it, the honesty of thought and eye and feeling and word." Powell, Dannye Romine: *Parting the Curtains: Interviews with Southern Writers*, Winston-Salem: Blair, 1994, p.115.

<sup>9</sup> It was actually while reading Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* that the thought of writing *Ellen Foster* first occurred to Gibbons. It is interesting to note that the story was originally written in the form of a poem narrated by a young African American girl (later transmuted into Starletta).

*Sights Unseen* (1995) both became bestsellers, *Sights Unseen* moreover won the Critics Choice Award from the San Francisco Chronicle. It is this novel that is most closely related to *Ellen Foster* as it is narrated by Hattie, who looks back from adulthood at how her mother's mental illness affected their family when Hattie was a girl. Like *Ellen Foster*, Hattie at twelve wants to be normal and to belong, and is wise beyond her years. Gibbons's sixth novel *On the Occasion of My Last Afternoon* (1998) has been considered her most brilliant to date. Her next novel, *Divining Women*, came out in 2004; and the sequel to *Ellen Foster* called *The Life All Around Me By Ellen Foster* has just been published (December 2005). Gibbons has also written her own biography - *Frost and Flower: My Life with Manic Depression So Far* (1995). Based on an invitation, she became a member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Her main characters are usually very self-reliant women from rural South. Gibbons cites both Flannery O'Connor and James Weldon Johnson as important literary influences on her work. She was designated "one of the most lyrical writers working today" by *Entertainment Weekly*.

**Lauren Slater**,<sup>10</sup> born 1962, has a masters' degree in psychology from Harvard University and a doctorate from Boston University. Her work was chosen for *The Best American Essays/Most Notable Essays* volumes of 1994, 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999. She was the winner of the 1993 New Letters Literary Award in creative non-fiction and of the 1994 Missouri Review Award. Her debut, *Welcome to My Country: A Therapist's Memoir of Madness* (published in 1997) deals with some of Slater's patients and becomes a revealing memoir and thoughtful meditation on the therapeutic process itself. In her next book called *Prozac Diary* (1999), Slater presents a remarkably honest and insightful account of her life with Prozac – a newly introduced antidepressant drug. *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* came out in 2000<sup>11</sup> and depicts author's childhood and adolescence, while her following book *Love Works Like This: Travels Through a Pregnant Year: A Memoir* (2003) portrays the discovery of true love ensued by the decision to open one's life to a child. In *Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the 20th Century* (2004), Slater documents the drama of extraordinary inquiries into human psychology, delivering a witty and stunningly perceptive view of the progress of the science of the human mind in the last century. Writer's latest book is an exploration of contemporary family dynamics, moral conundrums, and romantic love through one of the oldest literary forms—the fairy tale. *Blue Beyond Blue: Extraordinary Tales for Ordinary Dilemmas* (2005) thus assesses the value that fairy tales and fables still have in our culture as tools of healing and illumination. Besides writing, Slater dedicates herself to teaching creative nonfiction writing at Goucher College and directing After Care Services, a mental health and substance abuse clinic.

---

<sup>10</sup> The author's introduction is based on [www.bloomsbury.com/authors/](http://www.bloomsbury.com/authors/) and [http://us.penguin.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0\\_1000038061,00.html](http://us.penguin.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0_1000038061,00.html).

<sup>11</sup> The book was chosen by *Entertainment Weekly* as one of the top ten nonfiction books of the year. Its first printing (as well as its British printing) was called *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies*.

# 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

## 1.1. DEFINING POSTMODERN LITERATURE

*"Like other categorical terms (...) postmodernism suffers from a certain semantic instability. That is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists among scholars... Thus some critics mean by postmodernism what others call avant-gardism or even neo-avant-gardism, while still others would call the same phenomenon simply modernism."*

- Ihab Hassan<sup>12</sup>

Since we are about to deal with postmodern works of art, we find it appropriate to define the word "postmodern"<sup>13</sup> in respect to literature and perhaps art in general.<sup>14</sup>

Postmodern literature arose as a series of styles and ideas in the post-World War II period in reaction to the perceived norms of modernist literature. The term derives from "postmodernity," which a major theorist of postmodernism, Jean-François Lyotard, understood to represent the culmination of the process of modernity and Enlightenment thought, towards an accelerating pace of cultural change, to a point where constant change has in fact become the *status quo*, leaving the notion of progress obsolete.

The death of the Irish novelist James Joyce (1941), one of the last and most important representatives of modernism, is commonly used as a rough boundary for the start of postmodernism. Literature of this era does not set itself against modern literature as much as it develops and extends its style, making it self-conscious and ironic. Both modern

---

<sup>12</sup> Hawthorn, Jeremy: *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, London: Arnold, 1998, p.139, (emphasis his).

<sup>13</sup> In an essay *From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: the Local/Global Context*, Ihab Hassan points out a number of instances in which the term "postmodernism" was used before it became popular. E.g., John Watkins Chapman, an English salon painter, used it in the 1870s to mean Post-Impressionism; Federico de Onís used the word "postmodernismo" in 1934 to mean a reaction against the difficulty and experimentalism of modernist poetry; Arnold J. Toynbee used it in 1939 to mean the end of the "modern," Western bourgeois order dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> etc. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism>.

<sup>14</sup> Generally, we can say that all the 'post' discourses challenge our understanding and knowledge of ourselves and of the world. Postmodernism is often confused - or collapsed into one - with post-structuralism. These two certainly overlap, however, the first refers to a whole cultural era and mode, while the latter is a position in philosophy. The following definition is largely drawn from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodern\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodern_literature).

and postmodern literature represent a rupture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century realism, in which a story was told from an objective or omniscient point of view. As regards character development, postmodern (same as modern) literature explores subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the *stream of consciousness* styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In addition, both modern and postmodern literature explore fragmentation in narrative - and character - construction, reflective of the works of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg and the Italian author Luigi Pirandello.

However, while modernist literature saw fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis or a Freudian internal conflict, postmodern literature avoids this. The tortured, isolated anti-heroes of, say, Samuel Beckett, and the nightmare world of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, make way in postmodern writing for the self-consciously deconstructed and self-reflexive narrators of novels by Vladimir Nabokov, John Fowles, John Barth and, Julian Barnes.

Dubbed maximalism by some critics, the sprawling canvas and fragmented narrative of such writers as Dave Eggers has generated controversy on the "purpose" of a novel as narrative and the standards by which it should be judged. The postmodern position is that the style of a novel must be appropriate to that which it depicts and represents, and points back to such examples in previous ages as *Gargantua* by François Rabelais and the *Odyssey* of Homer. Many modernist critics attack the maximalist novel as being disorganized, sterile and filled with language play for its own sake, empty of value as a narrative – and, therefore, empty of value as a novel.

Where modernists hoped to unearth universals or the fundamentals of art, postmodernism aims to unseat them, to embrace diversity and contradiction. A postmodern approach to art thus rejects the distinction between low and high art forms. It rejects rigid genre boundaries and favors eclecticism, the free mixing of ideas and forms.<sup>15</sup> Partly due to

---

<sup>15</sup> "A new [literary] history of interrelations or intersections of forms is being written, and other genres like e.g., diaries and autobiographies are treated in the same way as fiction. (...)"

this rejection, it promotes parody, irony, and playfulness, commonly referred to as *jouissance* by postmodern theorists. They see postmodern art as a conflation or reversal of well-established modernist systems, such as the roles of artist versus audience, seriousness versus play, or high culture versus kitsch.

The idea of "play" text is an important concept in the postmodern view of language. In the context of postmodernism, "play" means changing the framework which connects ideas, and thus allows the troping, or turning, of a metaphor or word from one context to another, or from one frame of reference to another. Since, in postmodern thought, the "text" is a series of "markings" whose meaning is imputed by the reader, and not by the author, this play is the means by which the reader constructs or interprets the text, and the means by which the author gains a presence in the reader's mind. Play then involves invoking words in a manner which undermines their authority, by mocking their assumptions or style, or by layers of misdirection as to the intention of the author.

Instead of rooting knowledge in particular utterances, or "texts", the basis of knowledge is then also seen in the free play of discourse itself, (an idea that follows from Wittgenstein's idea of a language game). It is particularly this emphasis on the permission of a free play within the context of conversation and discourse that leads postmodernism to adopt the stance of irony, paradox, textual manipulation, reference and tropes.

Consequently, postmodernism has an obvious distrust toward claims about truth, ethics, or beauty being rooted in anything other than individual perception and group construction. Utopian ideals of universally applicable truths or aesthetics give way to provisional, decentered, local *petit récits* which, rather than referencing to an underlying universal truth or aesthetic, point only to other ideas and cultural artifacts, themselves subject to interpretation and re-

---

*One witnesses the process of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls nivelization or a leveling of genres.*"  
Ulmanová, Hana: *Contemporary American Fiction I*, In: Procházka, Martin a kol.: *Lectures on American Literature*, Prague: Karolinum, 2002, p.291, (brackets mine).



interpretation. The "truth," since it can only be understood by all of its connections is perpetually "deferred." Accordingly, a point of fixed knowledge which could be called "the truth" is impossible to reach. Whatever we might perceive as "truth" is no longer verifiable. This emphasis on construction and consensus often breeds antagonism with scientific thinking.

In the postmodern world, as Philip Roth says, reality is more incredible than fiction, thus it actually beats it. This means that the author can no longer rely on his imagination. For Thomas Pynchon, one of the icons of postmodern literature, reality as such does not even exist. In respect to art, he believes in the so called "creative paranoia." The chaotic world is reflected in chaos as the main artistic principle. A typical "Pynchonian" heroine not only loses control over the events around her, but also over herself. Directed by others, she changes into an anti-heroine for whom everything amounts to confusion. Destabilizing forces prevail and, correspondingly, not only protagonist's values, but *everything* is relative.<sup>16</sup> Now almost classically, reality is perceived as a conspiracy, the characters only play their parts.<sup>17</sup>

David Lodge has singled out five techniques typical of postmodern fiction, (noting, however, that these indicate only some of the possibilities): *contradiction* (words or ideas that cancel themselves out); *permutation* (incorporating alternative narrative lines in the same text); *discontinuity* (unpredictable swerves of language, metafictional asides to the reader, blank spaces in the text, contradiction, permutation, etc.); *randomness* (chanceful interplay of events, characters and language); and finally *excess* (e.g., taking metaphoric and metonymic devices to excess and testing them to deconstruction).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ulmanová, Hana: *Contemporary American Fiction I*, In: Procházka, Martin a kol.: *Lectures on American Literature*, Prague: Karolinum, 2002, p.292, reference to the whole paragraph, (emphasis mine).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.295.

<sup>18</sup> Hawthorn, p.143.

## 1.2. NARRATIVE AS PERFORMANCE

*"While popular wisdom suggests that a picture is worth a thousand words, it is also true that words present us with a thousand pictures."*

*-Marie Maclean<sup>19</sup>*

Marie Maclean offers a new dimension to narrative theory by emphasizing the return to the roots of oral narration in physical, personal interplay. Dissatisfied with the structuralist approach to the text as object, she emphasizes the necessity to explore narrative as the site of an interaction. In order to explain her view, she chooses the notion of performance as the most appropriate for her description of the play of forces involved. *"Performance at its most general and most basic level is a carrying out, a putting into action or into shape. Both movement and interaction are involved. (...) Performance always implies submitting to the gaze and measurement of others."* Furthermore, *"for a performance to be successful, it is not enough for it to have purpose; it must have energy and effect."*<sup>20</sup>

Even the most minimal narrative performance involves the teller and the hearer, or in other words, the sender and the receiver. Moreover, narrative, like the dramatic performance, always exceeds the elements it is composed of. *"The narrative must include not only the tale itself but the factors of teller, 'tellability', and audience response. It is clear, I hope, that just as narrative is not merely prose fiction, but a much more basic form of human verbal behaviour, so performance is not merely theatrical but extends into many different spheres of action."*<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, through a narrative text an author meets a reader in a collaborative or perhaps combative struggle for knowledge, power, and – maybe most importantly – pleasure. This meeting makes itself more or less manifest throughout the course of the narrative performance in which the performer, whether human or textual, assumes to control the audience by words or signs, while the hearers or readers – the

---

<sup>19</sup> Maclean, Marie: *Narrative as Performance, The Baudelairean Experiment*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.16.

<sup>20</sup> Maclean, p.xi.

<sup>21</sup> Maclean, p.xii.

necessary partners in the act – dictate the terms of the control. One can always refuse to listen or put down a book; and were one forced to listen it still remains true, as Maclean highlights, *“that words, in the last resort, can only mean what my mind allows them to mean. (...) Narrative performance thus involves an intimate relationship which, like all such relationships, is at once a co-operation and a contest, an exercise in harmony and mutual display of power. It is both ‘act’ and interaction, and implies a contract, a recognition of obligation and expectation, thus acknowledging the rules which govern the interplay.”*<sup>22</sup>

Whether a performance is spoken or written, it involves energy, which is neither husbanded nor spent without consequences, Maclean remarks. *“So the teller must constantly balance redundancy, or the many varied forms of repetition of the message (I must repeat myself so that you get the message, but not in such a way that you switch off), against entropy (although my use of the seemingly random is in fact governed by the ordering capacity of my listeners), or the danger that the new may be dispersed as random before it can be recognized.”*<sup>23</sup>

What can be considered negative energy is what John Fiske calls ‘noise’ – an amalgam of all the factors interfering with communication.<sup>24</sup> Maclean points out that while we tend to think of these factors as mechanical – actual noise, bad printing, radio interference; most ‘noise’ which disturbs communication resides in the minds of the hearers/receivers and includes such factors as their ignorance, incompetence, or unwillingness as well as, for example, their physical discomfort. *“In the teller-hearer relationship, therefore, just as redundancy is possibly the teller’s most useful tool, so ‘noise’, the hearer’s emotional, ideological, physical, linguistic tendency towards non-co-operation, seems at first the greatest enemy. Yet at the same time it can be an invaluable stimulus, constantly setting the challenge of winning the battle for control.”*<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Maclean, pp.xii-xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Maclean, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Maclean draws on Fiske, John: *Introduction to Communication Studies*, London: Methuen, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

The teller must also look for the delicate balance between providing not enough information and providing too much. There must remain 'gaps' or 'blanks' in the narrative sequence which trigger the hearers' imagination and the structuring power of their minds.<sup>26</sup>

As a teller strives to use audience response to control its reaction by modifying the performance, so the text seeks to construct its own reader. However, while narrators and narratees are and remain textual constructs, there is never any guarantee that the virtual reader/audience will obey the impulses of the text. In the case of the printed book, audience feedback – without which no live production is complete – is transformed and becomes the individual interpretation of the written text. Both are necessarily context-related and constantly subject to variation. There exists no one 'true' proprietorial interpretation,<sup>27</sup> as the individual readers can apply many differing criteria. (Similarly, Umberto Eco says that critical reading of any work of art is tied to the linguistic and cultural competence used by the individual reader; and Robert Barthes understands text metaphorically as the canopy of heaven that has neither frontiers nor marks and the way in which it will be looked at is up to its interpreter.<sup>28</sup>)

Narrative can therefore be viewed as a delicate interplay of power in which the narratee submits to the control of a narrator, while the narrator must scheme to overcome the power of the narratee. Each experiences an invasion of his or her territory by the other. The narrator has the advantage that a map of the territory can be included in the text. This is a means by which the narrator can control the advance of the other, turn it into desired paths, and ultimately even persuade him or her to cede territory. *"Fictional narrative is a game, but a game for high stakes, in which nothing less than the power of the text over the players is involved."*<sup>29</sup> Textual interplay/narrative contract can therefore be

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.19.

<sup>28</sup> Petrů, Eduard: *Úvod do studia literární vědy*, Olomouc: Rubico, 2000, p.47, (translation mine).

<sup>29</sup> Maclean, pp.17-18.

viewed as constantly open to negotiation.<sup>30</sup> *"The reader/audience is as it were invisible, but at the same time both vulnerable and powerful: vulnerable to the strategies of performance, to the conditions of utterance, but powerful in the right to co-operate or not to co-operate."*<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Maclean, p.20.

<sup>31</sup> Maclean, p.33.

### 1.3. TRAUMA IN FREUD AND CARUTH

*"If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed, at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet."*

- Cathy Caruth<sup>32</sup>

The beginnings of the theory of trauma are to be found in Freud's two important and controversial works, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*. It is in the former that we can encounter a quote from Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated*, which, according to Freud, represents "the most moving poetic picture of" what he will call "traumatic neurosis":

*"Its hero, Tancred, unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders' army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again."<sup>33</sup>*

Thus Tancred wounds his sweetheart in a battle; and later on, as if by chance, he unintentionally harms her again. As Cathy Caruth comments, these actions evocatively represent what Freud is trying to show in his texts, that is, the way in which the experience of a trauma accurately and ceaselessly repeats itself through the unconscious acts of the survivor and against his/her very will. "As Tasso's story dramatizes it, the repetition at the heart of catastrophe (...) emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Caruth, Cathy: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, History, and Narrative*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p.3.

<sup>33</sup> Freud, Sigmund: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, quoted in: Caruth, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> Caruth, p.2.

However, Caruth goes further suggesting that the literary resonance of Freud's example goes beyond this dramatic illustration of repetition compulsion and exceeds, perhaps, the limits of Freud's conceptual or conscious theory of trauma. What seems particularly striking to her in the example of Tasso is *"the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound."* Tancred not only repeats his act but also, in repeating it, he for the first time attends to a cry that wails out to him to heed what he has done. He is addressed by his darling, and in this address, Clorinda bears witness to the past that her beloved has unknowingly repeated. *"Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of the otherness of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know."*<sup>35</sup>

In her explorations of the ways in which different texts speak about and through the wound – the intense story of traumatic experience, Caruth focuses on the intricate modes in which knowing and not knowing are enmeshed in the language of trauma and in the stories that are associated with it. Alongside, Caruth faces the central problem of listening, and of representing that arises from the actual experience of the crisis and that any text on trauma engages. We can say that the texts analyzed by Caruth, same as our texts, thus ask what it means to transmit a crisis that is not marked by a simple knowledge, *"but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness. Such a question,"* argues Caruth, *"must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding."*<sup>36</sup>

The Greek word *trauma* originally referred to an injury on a body. However, in its later usage, especially in the psychiatric and medical literature, and above all in Freud's texts, the term *trauma* is understood

---

<sup>35</sup> Caruth, pp.2-3, (emphasis hers).

<sup>36</sup> Caruth, p.5.

as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.<sup>37</sup> According to Caruth, Freud suggests in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that “the wound of the mind – the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world – is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, like Tancred’s first infliction of a mortal wound on the disguised Clorinda in the duel, is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.” Just as the voice of Clorinda does not reach Tancred’s ears until the second wounding, so we cannot locate trauma in the simple original violent event of an individual’s past, but rather in the way in which “its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on.”<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, what Caruth derives from this crucial parable of the wound and the voice is that trauma appears to be much more than a pathology, or the illness of a wounded psyche: “it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.”<sup>39</sup>

As a narrative of a belated experience, as Caruth claims, the story of trauma does not impart an escape from reality – the escape from a death – but rather attests to its endless impact on a life. Indeed, Tancred of Tasso’s story does not escape the reality of death’s impact – of the wounding accident and of Clorinda’s death – but rather has to live it twice. The crisis at the heart of many traumatic narratives thus

---

<sup>37</sup> “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.” However, “there is no firm definition for trauma, which has been given various descriptions at various times and under different names.” Caruth, pp. 11 and 117, (emphasis hers).

<sup>38</sup> Caruth, pp.3-4, (emphasis hers).

<sup>39</sup> Caruth, p.4. Similarly, Juliet Mitchell states: “The trauma and its potential cure through the telling of it as a story are likely aspects of the human condition; they are not specifics of particular pathologies.” In: Brooks, Peter and Woloch, Alex ed.: *Whose Freud?: The Place of*



can be summed up in the following question: *“Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?”* Caruth therefore suggests that there is a kind of double telling at the core of these stories – it is the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unendurable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.<sup>40</sup>

Last but not least, the story of Tancred, the story of his repeated and unaware stabbing and the subsequent suffering that he recognizes through the voice of his beloved, represents not only the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past – the repetition of his own trauma as it moulds his life – but also the trauma of another, as the wound that speaks in the story is not precisely his own but instead, hers. As Caruth observes, we can of course understand this other voice, the voice of Clorinda, within the parable of the example, thus representing the other within the self that preserves the memory of the *“unwitting”* traumatic events of one’s past. However, we can also read the address of Clorinda’s voice not as the story of the individual in respect to the events of his own past, but *“as the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound.”*<sup>41</sup>

This listening to the address of another, an address that remains enigmatic yet still demands a listening and a response, is what Caruth discovers at the heart of Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud’s narrative of the dream of the burning child, particularly due to Lacan’s emphasis on the encounter between father and child. This child has died of a fever and his corpse catches fire due to an accidentally overturned candle. Meanwhile, his sleeping father, unconscious of the burning in the next

---

*Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture, New Haven: Yale UP, 2000, p.17.*

<sup>40</sup> Caruth, p.7.

<sup>41</sup> Caruth, p.8. *“The story of Tancred is thus equally,”* Caruth continues, *“the story of psychoanalytic writing itself. The figure of Tancred addressed by the speaking wound constitutes, in other words, not only a parable of trauma and its uncanny repetition but, more generally, a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which it nonetheless bears witness.”*

room, hears the voice of his dead child in his dream. As the voice is pleading him to see the fire by whispering: *“Father, don’t you see I’m burning?”* the father indeed awakens to see and extinguish the fire. *“It is this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken (...) that resonates in different ways throughout the texts this book attempts to read, and which, in this book’s understanding, constitutes the new mode of reading and of listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand.”*<sup>42</sup>

Caruth’s method, which we will employ particularly in chapters 2.5.3. and 2.5.4., is that of tracing the story, or better to say, *“the textual itinerary”* of insistently recurring words or figures. As Caruth claims, these figures, in their insistence, *“engender stories that emerge out of the rhetorical potential and the literary resonance of these figures, a literary dimension that cannot be reduced to the thematic content of the text or to what the theory encodes, and that, beyond what we can know or theorize about it, stubbornly persists in bearing witness to some forgotten wound.”*<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Caruth, p.9.

<sup>43</sup> Caruth, p.5.

## 2. FORM

*"One is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things,  
but for having chosen to say them in a certain way."  
- Jean Paul Sartre<sup>44</sup>*

When we discuss the form of a literary work we refer to its structure, shape and style. Form thus stands in opposition to substance yet they are inseparable. However, we can analyze them separately.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.1. TITLE

Title refers to the name given to an original composition such as a work of music, literature or art.<sup>46</sup> The title of a literary work can foreshadow its content, express the author's attitude to the theme, or call attention to its main character.<sup>47</sup>

The title "*Ellen Foster*" makes it immediately clear who will be the main heroine of the novel and calls to mind novels like Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. While we cannot know whether the book will treat one slice of her life (and which one), or its entirety, we are unlikely to be mistaken if we imagine an orphan child who is raised in a foster family, or an older woman who takes care of others. Let us see which of these will prove more accurate.

"*Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*" is a significantly more complex title that instantly faces us with a riddle. While we can calmly discard the notion of somebody *lying* in bed thanks to the subtitle of the work, it is particularly the contradiction inherent in the title and the subtitle that unsettles the readers from the very start. How can somebody lie in a memoir? Or better to say, how can somebody so openly admit to lying in a memoir? And how can a memoir be metaphorical? Interestingly,

---

<sup>44</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul: "*What is Literature?*" and *Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Cuddon, J.A.: *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982, p.277.

<sup>46</sup> [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title\\_\(intellectual\\_property\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Title_(intellectual_property)).

<sup>47</sup> Petruš, p.63, (translation mine).

the first printing of *Lying* was called *Spasm: A Memoir with Lies*. We could take *spasm* as a hint of an illness, but it could also indicate some sort of emotional seizure etc. However, the subtitle definitely rings less harsh than the later one, despite being similarly straightforward. Notwithstanding, the author's approach to non-fiction is evident in both versions of the title and will be dealt with in chapter 3.5. of this thesis.

## 2.2. GENRE

*"Kaye Gibbons is a writer who brings a short story sensibility to her novels. Rather than take advantage of the novel's longer form to paint her visions in broad, sweeping strokes, Gibbons prefers to concentrate on just one corner of the canvas and only a few colors to produce her small masterpieces. In Gibbons's case, her canvas is the American South and her colors are all the shades of gray."<sup>48</sup>*

*"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."<sup>49</sup>*

Genre is a French term for a literary type or class. As Tzvetan Todorov claims, it is a sociohistorical as well as a formal entity. The major classical genres were: epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy and satire, to which novel, short story, sonnet, essay, etc. were later added. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century the genres were carefully distinguished and writers expected to follow the prescribed rules. Over time, it became more generally accepted that genres have a conventional rather than an

---

<sup>48</sup> Editorial Review of *Ellen Foster*, *Oprah Book Club® Selection*, October 1997, [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp\\_proddesc\\_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp_proddesc_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155).

<sup>49</sup> Park, Mary, an editorial review of *Lying*, [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp\\_proddesc\\_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp_proddesc_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155), (emphasis hers).

intrinsic justification. Genres create audience and reader expectations and responses.<sup>50</sup>

*Ellen Foster* and *Lying* can both be considered species of a bildungsroman,<sup>51</sup> or a coming-of-age novel; a genre in which the main character passes from a child-like understanding of the world to an adult maturity, represented by books such as *Huckleberry Finn* or *Catcher in the Rye*. “*Ellen Foster is Gibbons’s attempt to rewrite the saga of the American hero by changing “him” to “her” and to rewrite the Southern female bildungsroman by changing its privileged, sheltered, upper-class heroine to a poor, abused outcast.*”<sup>52</sup> If we call *Ellen Foster* a semi-biographical narrative, we can claim *Lying* a semi-fictional memoir. While *Ellen Foster* represents an easy-to-grasp story in a quite common packaging, *Lying* is a very postmodern piece of literature that willfully resists categorization. One of Slater’s purposes is “*to ponder the blurry line between novels and memoirs. [Because] Everyone knows that a lot of memoirs have made-up scenes; it’s obvious. And everyone knows that half the time at least fictions contain literal autobiographical truths. So how do we decide what’s what, and does it even matter?*”<sup>53</sup> Slater claims that *Lying* is “*a book that takes up residence in the murky gap between genres and, by its stubborn self-position there, forces us to consider important things.*”<sup>54</sup>

*Ellen Foster* is based on the author’s nightmarish childhood experiences. Gibbons was only ten years old –the same age as Ellen at the beginning of the novel – when her mother committed suicide by

---

<sup>50</sup> Cuddon, p.285; and Hawthorn, Jeremy: *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, London: Arnold, 1998, pp.137-138. Here, and in the following footnotes that cite both authors, I combine their separate definitions into one. All the following references to Hawthorn are to this edition of the glossary.

<sup>51</sup> As it is a borrowing from German, we could also write “*Bildungsroman*.” In correspondence with Matthew Guinn (*After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South*, Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2000), I adhere to the use with small “b”.

<sup>52</sup> Makowsky, Veronica: ‘*The Only Hard Part Was the Food*’. *Recipes for Self-Nurture in Kaye Gibbon’s Novels*, In: *The Southern Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Nos.2-3, 1992, p.103, (emphasis hers). The extensive parallels between Twain’s and Gibbons’s bildungsroman are explored in e.g., Guinn, Matthew: *Mediation, Interpolation: Bobbie Ann Manson and Kaye Gibbons*, In: Guinn, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Slater, Lauren: *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, New York: Random House, 2000, p. 160, (parenthesis mine).

overdosing on medication. The author's portrayal of Ellen's father, who eventually drinks himself to death, is also autobiographical. In the novel, Gibbons fictionalizes her true life search for a loving home. Same as Ellen, Gibbons found such a home with a foster mother after suffering much abuse by her cruel, self-involved relatives.

In *Lying*, on the other hand, we are presented with an account of the development and life with epilepsy, yet it is questioned on the very first page of the memoir whether the author really suffered from the disease she writes about. Many of the biographical truths are conveyed metaphorically, and it seems that whenever we are inclined to believe that some part of the story really happened, the author surprises us with a confession of having invented that part, or at least not knowing herself whether it is totally or only partially true, or absolutely untrue. Yet while we can wonder whether Lauren Slater suffered from epilepsy, Munchausen's syndrome or another disease; it remains obvious that throughout her childhood and adolescent years she was lacking love and attention, due to which she developed a particularly problematic identity. Her quest is thus, primarily, a quest for a filling with which she could forever stuff the hole inside of her, same as it is a search for her own self and its approval.

The genre of bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel is often referred to as the "maturation novel," and also goes by other labels, e.g., "education novel," or "initiation novel." Although there may be some distinctions between their exact meanings, in general all these terms refer to fiction in which a protagonist, usually a young person who begins naive or ignorant, learns through her experiences everything necessary for successful functioning in the adult world and achieves a realistic understanding of what the world is like, bringing disillusioning experiences which teach an awareness of the evils to be contended with.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> DeMarr, pp.13-14. There are also "failed education novels" which are pessimistic as they reveal a protagonist whose experiences are negative in their impact and lead to withdrawal or defeat. "*Many stories with female protagonists exemplify this form, reminding readers of the*

*Ellen Foster* and *Lying* are coming-of-age novels as they trace the main heroines' movement from isolation into community, from abandonment into nurturance and acceptance, from childhood into adolescence and adulthood. Furthermore, both heroines learn from their experiences and mistakes. *Ellen Foster* moreover stresses the heroine's role in making this transformation occur. Ellen's family gives her a lesson on how a family should not be, and Ellen goes on engineering for herself a secure place in a nurturing and comforting family she has craved. Despite being surrounded by a racist world that teaches her to feel superior to black people simply on the ground of her own skin color, Ellen eventually discovers the error and injustice of this view. By virtue of her ability to think for herself and her will to effect change in her world, she grows into an empathetic and self-empowered girl.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Lauren moves from her mother's lesson that truth is bendable, onto her deep personal acknowledgement of the fact that lying is lonely. Coming to terms with her own self, or, in other words, overcoming the failure of not living up to her mother's expectations and demands, Slater becomes a self-healing story-teller. As an example of a story of self-discovery, "*here a young woman discovers not only what plagues her but also what heals her – the birth of sensuality, her creativity as an artist – in a book that reaffirms how a fine writer can reveal what is common to us all in the course of telling her own unique story.*"<sup>57</sup>

---

*cultural difficulties faced by women who attempt to become truly mature and autonomous.* " Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey Folks considers *Ellen Foster* a moral fable (i.e. brief allegorical narrative that both satirizes immoral behavior and illustrates a moral thesis) that concerns the obligation of taking responsibility for oneself and others. Folks, Jeffrey: *Obligations of the Dispossessed: The Ethical Vision of Kaye Gibbons's Ellen Foster and A Virtuous Woman*, In: Folks, Jeffrey: *From Richard Wright to Toni Morrison: Ethics in Modern & Postmodern American Narrative*, New York : P. Lang, 2001, pp.151,161.

<sup>57</sup> From a review of *Lying*, In: *Washington Post Book World*, May 19, 1996, p. 13.

## 2.3. STRUCTURE

Structure is the sum of the relationships of the parts to each other; thus, the whole. Usually we make a distinction between a literary work's structure and its plot: whereas a work's plot can be viewed as the narrative arrangement of its story, structure refers to its total organization.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.3.1. TIME-SHIFT NARRATIVE

*Ellen Foster* comprises fifteen chapters whose length varies, consisting of four to six pages in the first half of the novel and ten to fifteen pages in its second part, which is still short enough to keep up with the vitality of the main character and thus the pace of her narration. There is not a single chapter that would not contain at least one shift in time from present to past or vice-versa. These changes are usually marked out by a gap between paragraphs and often accompanied by an exact description of where we are at the moment. Consequently, localization serves as a determiner of time. Ellen's present life takes place at "new mama's" (Ellen's foster mother) while the past is an enumeration of places and situations that Ellen had to go through before finally reaching her wonderful new home. The events of the past year are always relayed in hindsight. This use of flashbacks to disclose the most painful moments of Ellen's life allows the heroine as the narrator to shape her traumatic past experiences around her happy ending. From a secure vantage point in the foster family, Ellen looks back at the turmoil and pain she has lived through in her own family and feels "glad to rest" in her new home, where "there is a plenty to eat," where "it is all so neat and clean," and where "nobody yells after anybody to do this or that."<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Cuddon, p.662; Hawthorn, p.335.

<sup>59</sup> Gibbons, Kaye: *Ellen Foster*, New York: Vintage Books, 1990, pp.2, 5 and 120.



Overall, this narrative strategy of jumping back and forth between the goodness of Ellen's life with her "new mama" and the horror of her life previous to her 11<sup>th</sup> year Christmas Day reminds us of the interchapters and main stories of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*. Similarly to Nick Adams, the hero of *In Our Time* (whom Ellen chooses as her fictitious boyfriend when she wants to avenge herself on her spoiled and mean Cousin Dora), Ellen still has – and will always have – the years of trauma behind her. No matter how happy her new life is, the trauma remains an inextricable part of the fabric of her self/psyche. These shifts in time and space thus serve as a literary representation of Ellen's polarized emotional and psychological state. They make explicit the oscillation between the trauma and the life after the trauma. This makes us consider the way in which living with the burden of the past, after the trauma, affects us. There are, naturally, varying degrees of suffering, but regardless the degree to which they are felt, they can still take hold of one in the future. It sometimes makes moving forward into life after the pain difficult. One might wonder and be afraid of how the past could creep into the present and/or future. Ellen demonstrates quite little of this. When living with her grandmother who wishes hard that Ellen were like her much hated son-in-law, Ellen occasionally checks in the mirror whether she has turned into him or not. Similarly, she asks her "new mama" at one point whether she exhibits any of her parents' past behavior and is calmed down on hearing that she, of course, does not.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Ellen tends to – at times very stubbornly – focus on the present time in order to keep herself from pondering the past:

*"The only problem is that all that free time leaves your head open for thinking and before you know it your brain slips a [sic] idea in and you have to shoo it away like that baby Roger clawing around in my business. So I try to keep my head pretty full at all times. But as soon as a spare room opens up in there here comes somebody like my daddy settling in thinking he might make his self right at home."<sup>61</sup>*

---

<sup>60</sup> Ellen's problem with the past reflects that of the author's. In the first years after the publication of the book, Gibbons kept denying that *Ellen Foster* was autobiographical. Being ashamed of her past, she lied about it. Later, by working with the Adult Children of Alcoholics group, she was able to see that her family background was not a reflection of her character at that time. "It has informed my personality development, but I should be able to get beyond it. I think that I could only tell the truth when I had enough self-esteem to do it." Powell, p.122.

<sup>61</sup> Gibbons, p.102. In my analysis of the novels, I change the font size and separate quotations

There are moments when Ellen not only does not want to think – let alone talk – about the past, but nor is she able to do so: “*Before you can talk you have to line it all up in order and I had rather just let it swirl around until I am too tired to think. You just let the motion in your head wear you out. Never think about it. You just make a bigger mess that way.*”<sup>62</sup> However, when the past does return into the present, Ellen feels dizzy: “*So what do you do when that spinning starts and the motion carries the time wild by you and you cannot stop to see one thing to grab and stop yourself?*”<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, by employing this technique of time shifts, Gibbons emphasizes Ellen’s determination. As if we were constantly reminded of the fact that Ellen has endured. At the beginning of the novel we are introduced to the heroine as being part of a new family; her security is obvious. Then we are taken past that and put back in her recent past life by means of her visits with her therapist every Tuesday. The ugliness of her life with her biological parents is described starting with her mother’s illness and suicide, and soon we are hijacked to the orderly, nurturing present with the pony and the new family. The story moves on in this way until the past is worked out and the present worked up to. The two narratives only connect in the last chapter of the novel as Ellen tells the reader: “*You know she [Starletta] will be here [in Ellen’s foster home] after school today. And I am ready.*”<sup>64</sup>

Not surprisingly, these shifts heighten our suspense as the narrative of the past is often suspended for a moment at some (likely-to-be) turning point. On the other hand, this sudden move also calms us down and prepares us for further afflictions as it is frequently a heartbreaking, tough situation that is interrupted by an oasis of normal life where one worries about setting the table for dinner or going grocery-shopping. This is particularly conspicuous in the scene of Ellen’s “*mama’s*” death

---

from the rest of the text wherever the citation is six lines or longer. I do this for greater clarity.

<sup>62</sup> Gibbons, p.89.

<sup>63</sup> Similarly in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* that seems to parallel *Ellen Foster* in many ways: the dizziness, the time shifts, having to take care of the one who is the source of one’s pain, black and white relations, focus on identity (difficulty of constructing an identity around trauma in light of trauma).

<sup>64</sup> Gibbons, p.121, (brackets mine).

that is thus postponed, or in Ellen's leave of Aunt Betsy – one of the many relatives who do not want her – when Ellen has no other option but to return to her abusive father.<sup>65</sup> In this way, lightness and hardship of living are juxtaposed and our stay in the land of not knowing is prolonged, yet soothing.

### 2.3.2. DECONSTRUCTIONIST FORAYS

*Lying* consists of four parts (containing eight chapters altogether) preceded by an introduction and followed by an afterword. The book as a whole stirs along the verge of a memoir and a fiction, containing (more or less truthful) stories from the author's life same as (would-be) scientific articles, letters to the reader and the editor, occasionally even pieces of poetry. The four parts – *Onset*, *The Rigid Stage*, *The Convulsive Stage* and *The Stage of Recovery* - are named according to the stages of a grand mal attack,<sup>66</sup> the description of which is presented to us in a form of a motto, taken from *The Text Book of Grand and Petite Mal Seizures in Childhood, 1854* – or so does the author claim.

The *Introduction*, supposedly written by Hayward Krieger (whose syntactical patterns are identical to Slater's own), *Professor of Philosophy from the University of Southern California*, serves as an advertisement for Slater's work same as it supports the earnestness and authenticity of *Lying*. "I first encountered Lauren Slater as a writer when I read her account of schizophrenia in her book *Welcome to My Country*. Since that time I have followed her work, always intrigued by its development,"<sup>67</sup> However, later on in the book, in the article on Slater's operation, we learn that "we have been unable to locate or confirm the existence of any Hayward Krieger,"<sup>68</sup> a professor of

---

<sup>65</sup> Gibbons, pp. 9-10, 42-43.

<sup>66</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* describes grand mal as "a form of epilepsy characterized by severe seizures involving spasms and loss of consciousness."

<sup>67</sup> Slater, p. ix.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101. Thus, within the text, Krieger is himself situated in Slater's place of "not-

philosophy with whom Lauren, already as a child – but also a patient prone to mythomania, claims to have correspondence.

*Part One: Onset* opens with a chapter whose entirety and sincerity “*I exaggerate.*”<sup>69</sup> is striking and provocative, serving both as a warning and a tease at the same time. Having digested this bittersweet appetizer, we can move onto *Three Blind Mice*, a chapter that describes the beginnings of Slater’s illness and more importantly, her relationship with her mother. “As Slater acknowledges,<sup>70</sup> the structure of this narrative [this and the following chapter] is lifted from Leonard Kriegel’s essay, ‘Falling into Life,’ in which he reflects on [h]aving lost the use of [his] legs during the polio epidemic [...] of 1944.”<sup>71</sup>

In *Learning to Fall*, which is the opening chapter of *Part Two: The Rigid Stage*, the mother-daughter relationship is further explored, same as the development and treatment of the illness. Lauren feels strong and confident for the first time in her life after attending the convent school and the first hints of adolescence and her separation from her mother are marked by two simple words “*The End*”<sup>72</sup>, preceded by an enumeration of thanks to all the people who have helped Slater in any way to write this book (remindful of the typical thank you speeches delivered at the Oscars). “*Not quite.*” – the end is suppressed on the next page, and a letter to the reader follows, that is, Chapter 4: *Sincerely, Yours.*

Here the author recounts her first adolescent years when she started to steal, lie and pretend. It seems a love letter to herself as she finally admits to some of the crucial lies with which she has been shielding herself. Three extracts from different psychiatry journals describing case studies of the Munchausen’s syndrome (factitious illness) are

---

*knowing,*” where fact and fantasy intersect, and to which he has been inviting us. There is no one by this name at the USC website and Google search engine only uncovers a conference where Krieger presented a paper some years ago, yet the email address, which locates him at the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt, Oder, bounces back.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> “(...) thanks especially to Leonard Kriegel, essayist par excellence, whose story *Falling into Life*, from which I have so generously borrowed, helped me to find my own true tale; (...)” Slater, p.58.

<sup>71</sup> Ingram, Richard: *Life Plagiarizing Illness: Lauren Slater's Lying*, September 2001, <http://nasty.cx/archives/000398.php>, (former parenthesis mine, latter his).

<sup>72</sup> Slater, p.59.

included, adding veracity to her account.<sup>73</sup> The following chapter, an article<sup>74</sup> on Slater's operation, reputedly written by her doctor Carlos Neu (whose existence is later called in question), has similar function.

*Part Three: The Convulsive Stage* depicts the author's birth of creative powers and sexuality in the chapter called *The Cherry Tree*; and moves on in a chapter disguised as a memo to the author's editor – *How to Market This Book*. The last part, *The Stage of Recovery*, recounts Slater's religious and further writing pursuits, and the *Afterword* justifies her creation.

This *relatively* straightforward narrative of illness, cure, and love affair is interspersed with a metanarrative – a meditation on the nature of truth and lie, fact and fiction; which repeatedly casts doubt as to the veracity of Slater's life story. This metanarrative will be treated in more detail in chapter 3.5. of the thesis.

## 2.4. POINT OF VIEW

A point of view is the related experience of the narrator — not that of the author. Literary narration can occur from the first-person, "third person omniscient", or "third person limited" point of view. The first-person point of view sacrifices omniscience and omnipresence for a greater intimacy with one character. A third person omniscient narrator can shift focus from character to character with the knowledge of everyone's thoughts and of events of which no single character would be aware. The third person limited point of view picks one character and follows him or her around for the duration of the book. The narrator may be more observant than the character, but is limited to what that one character could theoretically observe. A small number of novels have

---

<sup>73</sup> "These case studies are, like their documented sources, probably all invented; and the third case study bears an uncanny resemblance to Slater herself." Ingram, *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> As Christian Perring points out in a review (September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000) on [www.mentalhelp.net](http://www.mentalhelp.net): "...no acknowledgement appears on the copyright page thanking the publisher of the journal for permission to reprint the article."

been written in the second person, frequently paired with the present tense.<sup>75</sup>

#### 2.4.1. ENTERTAINING FIRST-PERSON NARRATION

*"Among Ms. Gibbons's triumphs in the novel is her ability to disappear into her narrator so completely that the story seems to come straight from Ellen's mouth without authorial intervention."<sup>76</sup>*

As has been implied, Ellen Foster – the main protagonist of the novel – functions as the mediator of the story. This first-person narration that is maintained throughout the entirety of the novel remarkably adds to its distinctiveness. We are given a subjective and thus limited view of all the other characters and events introduced; nevertheless, the story gains immediacy and sense of life. Ellen's perspective is unique – a child of ten amidst the swirling anger and narrowness of her family soon proves not to be lost – but instead grounded – in the real world even more than any adult family member. Through her wise<sup>77</sup> eyes we perceive that the adults around her are much less capable of taking care of her than she is herself. Ellen's dogged and spirited first-person narration unveils her good humor and resourcefulness and makes the story entertaining, while a third-person rendering of her miserable circumstances would have probably become maudlin and somber. *"What might have been grim, melodramatic material in the hands of a less talented author is instead filled with lively humor (...), compassion and intimacy."<sup>78</sup>*

---

<sup>75</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Point\\_of\\_view\\_%28literature%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Point_of_view_%28literature%29).

<sup>76</sup> McCauley, Stephen, 'He's Gone. Go Start the Coffee,' In: *The New York Times Book Review*, April 11, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Some critics deliberated the believability of Ellen's position as narrator, questioning whether she is too wise for her years. In *Kirkus Reviews*, a critic suggests that Ellen's instinctual wisdom belies her eleven years yet in her "innocence" and "tough stoicism" the voice of this young narrator "rings true." *Kirkus Reviews*, March 15, 1987, p. 404.

<sup>78</sup> Hoffman, Alice: *Shopping for a New Family*, In: *New York Times Book Review*, May 31, 1987, p. 13.

## 2.4.2. MULTIPLE VOICES AND EARS

Not surprisingly, the majority of *Lying* is also related in a first-person narration, yet there are a couple of exceptions. As has been mentioned above, different narrators speak to us in the introduction and the articles that Slater incorporates in her memoir. While Hayward Krieger assumes an ordinary “I” as he is speaking for himself, giving us his opinion, Dr. Neu and his colleague assume the scientific “we”, typical for a piece of writing such as they produce here (similarly in the extracts from the journals). It has been said that the strategy of including these speakers renders credibility to the whole story, and we can affirm that it is secondary whether these characters really exist or not. What is more important are the addressees of these pieces of writing, as it is particularly the aspect of the audience addressed that makes the reader believe them. Whereas the addressee in *Ellen Foster* remains the same throughout the novel, here the audience changes, or at least becomes double at moments. Hayward Krieger (alias Lauren Slater) speaks directly to us, same as the author does for most of her memoir; yet the incorporated articles, or their sections, are (at least hypothetically) addressed to the whole scientific public, and similarly, the letter to the editor is (at least supposedly) directed to the entire marketing department of Slater’s publisher.

It must be remarked that Slater as a narrator repeatedly reminds us of the fact that she may be unreliable. Her memoir is concerned with what she calls “*narrative truth*,” as opposed to “*historical truth*,” and as such – neither fiction nor (wholly) non-fiction – is not only disconcerting, but even irritating and frustrating; yet, simultaneously, illuminating.

## 2.5. STYLE

*"The language of literature has always meant more to me than the plot or the character. I was always interested in why the author chose the words."*

*- Kaye Gibbons<sup>79</sup>*

Style derives from a Latin term meaning stake, or pointed instrument for writing. It is the characteristic manner of expression in prose or verse; how a particular writer (literary group or period) says what she has to say. The assessment of style includes examination of a writer's choice of words, her figures of speech, the devices she employs, the shape of her sentences and paragraphs, beauty and effectiveness of her expression etc. Generally, we discuss three different elements of style: diction (denotes the vocabulary used by the writer and its effect on the work as a whole), imagery (generally covers the use of language to represent thoughts, feelings, objects, actions, states of mind etc.; often through the means of figurative language, symbols etc.), and syntax<sup>80</sup> (the arrangement of words into phrases, clauses and sentences; the use of in/direct speech, punctuation, the distribution of sentence length, etc.).<sup>81</sup>

### 2.5.1. Diction – Old Ellen says it is OK

Ellen's narration is consistently informal and conversational, endowed, like Gibbons herself, with the flat, droll accent of North Carolina; therefore in correspondence with the language of an eleven year old who has grown up in the Southern United States. Through Ellen, Gibbons employs colloquialisms, slang, and especially humor to tell the story.<sup>82</sup> The frequent use of incorrect vocabulary and grammar

---

<sup>79</sup> Powell, p.116.

<sup>80</sup> The definition of syntax that follows is drawn from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stylistics\\_%28linguistics%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stylistics_%28linguistics%29).

<sup>81</sup> Cuddon, p.663; Hawthorn, p.337.

<sup>82</sup> The diction of the novel markedly changes in Ellen's conversations with black people as Gibbons accurately portrays their way of speaking: "*Her mama says you can sweep and sweep*



(e.g., recurrent erroneous use of articles: *a egg, a appetite* etc., or persistent use of the past tense form of the verb instead of the past participle form) further lends authenticity to the story. The style is very blunt and raw, at times remindful of the stream-of-consciousness narratives. It makes us feel as if we were reading a diary of the heroine, or better, as if we were directly listening to her speaking. There is a very present feel to the writing. Everything seems to be happening right now. The story lives in Ellen's present head and she exposes its workings to us. We can even agree with Pearl Bell that *"the voice of this resourceful child is mesmerizing because we are right inside her head."*<sup>83</sup>

As a result of Gibbons's way of relating the story, Ellen's suffering does not seem so bad. The harrowing tragedies of her life either appear so surreal or so obscure, and most of all are recounted in such a simple, matter-of-fact, frequently even ironical and humorous<sup>84</sup> manner that it is often enjoyable to read about them. Thanks to the humor that is so intricately woven into Ellen's character and thus also her diction, the truth of her pain is dulled and the story is held back from the realm of overwhelming depression. For example, as Ellen is changing for her "mama's" funeral in the bathroom, and all her relatives and neighbors are around the house, she thinks to herself: *"I ought to stuff my front and walk out with a sudden big chest. Give them something to see and discuss. Not just speculation."* Thereafter she comments on her aunt Nadine's ("mama's" sister) visual aspect: *"She wants to look especially good because she has elected herself to ride in the big car,"* the same as her conversational competence: When Nadine searches for the right thing to say to the driver and finally exclaims: *"What a lovely day!"* Ellen meditates: *"(...) my mama is dead in the church, my daddy is a monster, your girl is probably going to pee on me before this ride is over*

---

*and sweep until you is blue in the face. (...) They call him Missa Bill. (...) You gots to git em when they is still soff when you mashum. (...) Lord chile."* Gibbons, pp.30, 36, 37 and 64.

<sup>83</sup> Bell, Pearl: *Southern Discomfort*, In: *The New Republic*, Vol. 198, No. 9, February 29, 1988, p.41, (emphasis mine).

<sup>84</sup> "George Santanaya, a distinguished American philosopher, notes that the comic response can handle situations too bleak for tragedy. Humor thus offers a safety valve for pressures that might otherwise unbalance reason." Ulmanova, *ibid*, p.293.

and that is all you can find to say.”<sup>85</sup> Likewise, when “mama’s mama” dies just before Christmas and Aunt Betsy is put out by that, Ellen remarks: “I was dying my own self to tell her well Betsy why don’t you see if the undertaking driver will stop and let you shop a minute on the way to the grave? but I just said I thought now was as good a time as any for her to go.”<sup>86</sup>

While this humor partially serves as Ellen’s defense, it also reinforces the effect Ellen’s life has had on her. She becomes a wise “old Ellen”—as she calls herself—at the age of eleven. Consequently, and paradoxically, the comicality of the novel makes us experience the sadness of seeing a girl so young aged so quickly. Each horrible event, from her drunkard, abusive father to her definitely evil “mama’s mama,” is a wound that adds up to the collective trauma of a childhood completely lost amid the rubble of familial dysfunction. “There is something almost Dickensian about Ellen’s tribulations; like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* or a host of other literary child heroes, Ellen is at the mercy of predatory adults, with only her own wit and courage—and the occasional kindness of others—to help her through. That she does, in fact, survive her childhood and even rise above it is the book’s bittersweet victory.”<sup>87</sup>

### 2.5.2. Crisp Poetry in a Pool of Prose

Slater’s style can be viewed as more elevated, considerably more poetic, often lyrical; therefore much more descriptive than that of *Ellen Foster*. It is also definitely more correct in respect to grammar, and richer in vocabulary. However, the style becomes more colloquial and even vulgar after the awakening of the heroine’s sexuality and towards the end of the novel. Unlike Gibbons, Slater does not try to lock the readers in the mind of an eleven year old. While Ellen’s narration and

---

<sup>85</sup> Gibbons, pp.14 and 16.

<sup>86</sup> Gibbons, p.90.

<sup>87</sup> Editorial review, [http://windsorlibrary.org/EllenFoster\\_k20050125.doc](http://windsorlibrary.org/EllenFoster_k20050125.doc).

style are consistent with her age<sup>88</sup> - which does not change much throughout the course of the novel; Lauren – who covers far longer stretch of life in her memoir - does not hesitate to interrupt her memories of the past with a present insight or question (frequently rhetorical). Thus we are now and then reminded of the adult author speaking to us, despite hearing once a childish voice, once a teenager, or a woman of forty.

Describing the beginning of her illness, the pre-seizure auras, Slater says: *"First I smelled jasmine, and then I had whole moments when the world went watery, when I saw the air break apart and atomize into dozens of glittering particles. Ahead of me shapes and colors suggested the billowing sails of a ship, or a zebra floating, when in reality it was just a schoolgirl in the crosswalk. I had not known, until then, that beauty lived beneath the supposedly solid surface of things, how every line was really a curve uncreased, how every hill was a smoke."*<sup>89</sup>

Later she sums up her seizures: *"I was a wrong girl, I flamencoed on the floor, feathers came out of my ears, and my body made music, made thunder and sleep, made Mozart, my hands curled into lobster claws."*<sup>90</sup> It seems we are given poetry in prose.

Nonetheless, her diction remains this poetic, playful and full of concrete similes throughout the book, auras and seizures aside:

*"There, in the dark-paneled office, it was just me and the swan [Dr. Swan] and the leaded-glass windows. When it snowed, the flakes through the glass looked huge and ragged and the bare branches out there were networks of nerves like the pictures I'd seen in the neurologist's office. As spring came, the nerves grew buds that did not seem beautiful to me, little green cysts with pus in them."*<sup>91</sup> The imagination and viewpoint of Lauren as a child resonates here, same as in the following examples: *"I didn't know what downs meant. I pictured goose feathers, fairy children as delicate as feathers all dropping from the sky and blown around."*<sup>92</sup> And: *"I loved the bubble windows, and the stewardesses who wore wings on their busts."*<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> "Gibbons never allows us to feel the slightest doubt that [Ellen] is only 11. Nor does she ever lapse into the condescending cuteness that afflicts so many stories about precocious children." Bell, p.39, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>89</sup> Slater, pp.8-9.

<sup>90</sup> Slater, p.24.

<sup>91</sup> Slater, p.37, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>92</sup> Slater, pp.31-32.

<sup>93</sup> Slater, p.11.

Although Slater also employs phrases like “(...) *the birds cooed or the oak trees creaked (...)*”<sup>94</sup> that make us ‘hear’ the cooing and creaking, her prose attacks all of our senses almost constantly even without them. Her modifiers are so colorful that it seems impossible not to imagine whatever she is describing: “*The tawny sun rose like a lazy lion, all hot fur in a pink safari sky.*”<sup>95</sup> Similarly: “*Frail rain fell, casting a silver net over the neighborhood. Then the sky cleared. The sun went down in a pool of red, and all the flowers smelled like lotion.*”<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, Slater seems to go overboard with these colorful descriptions. As the sun repeatedly goes down “*in a pool of red*” or “*the air is crisp*” again her device loses its freshness and thus also its power, and instead becomes boring and even tiring. “*Her prose is vivid and poetic, albeit a little overwritten at times.*”<sup>97</sup>

There are instants when Lauren’s humor and playfulness somewhat remind that of Ellen’s: “*That episode did change my world, and my mother’s too. No more Dr. Swan. Good-bye, Dr. Swan. A high dose of drugs. Hello, drugs. And the school for falling children, in Topeka, Kansas, where Dorothy and her little dog had once lived.*”<sup>98</sup>

### 2.5.3. Imagery – Starving for Mama

The predominant image of *Ellen Foster* is undoubtedly that of a “*mama.*” “*Mama,*” often a baby’s first word, illustrates Ellen’s very basic, almost infantile, need for a mother. “*Mamas*” permeate the novel from the beginning to end, reflecting Ellen’s deep longing for love and care. In this way, Ellen’s loss of her “*real mama,*” whose name we never learn

---

<sup>94</sup> Slater, p.9.

<sup>95</sup> Slater, p.12.

<sup>96</sup> Slater, p.64.

<sup>97</sup> Auchter, Amanda: *Country Worth Visiting*, August 22, 2004, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0385487398/104-6882972-0343113?v=glance&n=283155> When Slater rides on a bus to a writer’s workshop, she sees “(...) *two deer standing on a slope by the side of the road, their slender heads lifted, their eyes, infinite pools.*” One must take it as a part of the writing exercise she has been working on. Otherwise, it is simply too much. Quote from Slater, p.117, (emphasis mine). We could go as far as to saying that Slater’s pretentiousness occasionally threatens to ruin her book.

and who commits suicide in the chapter two, reverberates throughout the story. Any woman Ellen notices from then on is referred to not by her name but in terms of her status as a mother. Thus Aunt Nadine is "*Dora's mama*," Starletta's (Ellen's best friend) mother is known as "*Starletta's mama*," Ellen's foster mother is her "*new mama*," Ellen's grandmother is never a '*granny*' but always "*mama's mama*," and young Stella of the foster family is baby Roger's "*official mama*." There are only two women in the novel who are called by their names: Aunt Betsy who has no children and therefore lacks 'qualification' as a mother; and Mavis, the big woman from "*mama's mama's*" field, whose children we never get to know and whose name sounds unlike other ones, as Ellen asserts.<sup>99</sup>

Another image prevalent in the novel is that of food, reflecting similarly Ellen's hunger for nurturing and sustenance.<sup>100</sup> When we first hear of Ellen's foster home, she tells us of their eating habits; and it seems that whenever we return to this new home of hers, some good meal is being cooked or has been eaten. In other words, her new home is repeatedly referred to in terms of gratified hunger: "*There is a plenty to eat here and if we run out of something we just go to the store and get some more.*"<sup>101</sup> Ellen's very first entrance into this home is marked by the smell of roast chicken, which she detects in spite of the fact that her new mama has not roasted chicken for three days. This clearly indicates her desperation for nurture. Similarly, the appetite Ellen has right after her mother's funeral is astonishing: she goes home alone and eats "*right out of the bowls*"<sup>102</sup> the food the ladies from the church have sent. Neglected by her father, Ellen tries to prepare herself whatever they had at school, but figures the best deal is buying frozen dinners, "*the plate froze with the food already on it. A meat, two vegetables, and*

---

<sup>98</sup> Slater, p.45.

<sup>99</sup> Gibbons, p.64.

<sup>100</sup> Lauren also repeatedly finds comfort in food, e.g., Slater, pp.171 or 178.

<sup>101</sup> Gibbons, p.2.

<sup>102</sup> Gibbons, p.23.

*a dab of dessert.*<sup>103</sup> These frozen plates are symbolically fitting as an indication of the spiritually cold comfort she has been experiencing.

However, Ellen does not only put food in her stomach, she also attempts to maintain her past standards, which sometimes turns out disserviceable. For example, when she finds refuge in her black friend's house where it *"always smells like fried meat"* and where Starletta's *"mama is at the stove boiling and frying"*<sup>104</sup> all the time, Ellen, despite her quenchless hunger, will not eat the food Starletta's mama prepares because: *"No matter how good it looks to you it is still a colored biscuit."*<sup>105</sup>

Ellen often remembers gardening with her mother. This *production of food* is not only a soothing memory, but also an important life lesson that Ellen receives from her mama when she is still in relatively good health and to which Ellen clings after her death. Through the production of food, Gibbons suggests, *"mama"* teaches little Ellen not only to tell right from wrong, beans from weeds, but also what an exemplary adult is, a model who has grown *"to the right stage."* This is a lesson that Ellen desperately needs as she later confronts a series of caretakers who cannot or will not feed her, physically or mentally.

Ellen's grandmother provides her with sufficient food *"just because she did not have it in her to starve a girl,"*<sup>106</sup> but she does not mind starving her for affection. There is plenty to eat but no sense of togetherness at mealtimes in her home: *"When we both ate at the same Sunday table we both picked at our little individual chickens or turkeys and did not talk."*<sup>107</sup> Yet Ellen does not mind as she has completely lost hope in her grandmother as a nurturer. She decided early on that her grandmother *"might be a witch but she has the dough,"* but later, *"I called her the damn witch to myself and all the money she had did not matter anymore."*<sup>108</sup> Ellen has realized that there is much more to a

---

<sup>103</sup> Gibbons, p.25

<sup>104</sup> Gibbons, p.29.

<sup>105</sup> Gibbons, p.32.

<sup>106</sup> Gibbons, p.75.

<sup>107</sup> Gibbons, p.66.

<sup>108</sup> Gibbons, p.61.

meal than food on the table and that society's substitution of money for "dough" produces a mess that is not edible.

Yet another instance of food imagery is Ellen's father's focus on her body as baby food, milk and candy. "You got girl ninnies he might say. (...) Somebody else calling out sugar blossom britches might sound sweet but it was nasty from him."<sup>109</sup> This is indicative of the perverse immaturity of his sexuality. Apparently, Gibbons intends him to represent a socially pervasive view of women as objects for consumption. His black drinking buddies advise him, again in eating imagery, on the night that he rapes her:<sup>110</sup> "Yours is just about ripe. You gots to git em when they is still soff when you mashum."<sup>111</sup>

In the foster home, "cooking becomes associated with the rituals of community and love as the children and their foster mother cook their week's lunches on Sunday and receive individual cooking lessons during the week. The kitchen is no longer a place of conflict or empty routines, but is filled with affection."<sup>112</sup> Ellen's foster mother "is there each day in the kitchen and that is something when you consider she does not have to be there but she is there so I can squeeze her and be glad."<sup>113</sup> Notwithstanding, even while living there, where making and eating food are apparently central activities, Ellen says "I stay starved though," and predicts: "I know that ten years from now I will be a member of the food industry. Or I might read or do art. I have seen many pictures drawn or painted of food. They always appeal to me."<sup>114</sup> That her obsession with food continues proves how deeply traumatized she is from the years without nourishing affection. To conclude, her hunger and preoccupation with food, same as her fixation on mother figures, mirror her twin needs: to be taken care of and to belong.

---

<sup>109</sup> Gibbons, pp.43-44.

<sup>110</sup> Makowsky, p.105. Makowsky talks of rape but it is doubtful whether the father has succeeded to this extent in his daughter's sexual abuse. Looking closely at the text, it seems more likely that Ellen has managed to resist him. However, his intention to rape her is indubitable.

<sup>111</sup> Gibbons, p.37.

<sup>112</sup> Makowsky, p.108.

<sup>113</sup> Gibbons, p.86.

<sup>114</sup> Gibbons, p.58.

An object that becomes symbolic and very important to Ellen is a plastic microscope that she gives herself for Christmas and that she takes with her throughout her quest. *“When troubled or isolated, she spends her time looking through it, satisfying her curiosity about the natural world, and finding escape from her terrible experiences.”* The microscope also serves her as a stage prop when she provokes an argument in result of which Aunt Nadine throws her out on Christmas Day. This misfortune turns out to be for the better as it enables Ellen to reach her goal of going to her *“new mama.”* Apparently, the microscope is an image for seeing, *“for perceiving that which most people are not aware of, and as such is an appropriate image for Ellen herself, whose ability to see and understand people and situations helps enable her to survive.”*<sup>115</sup> It is at once a toy, an escape mechanism, same as a scientific tool that nourishes her active mind. One day, Ellen hopes to have a professional model.

On the whole, Gibbons wonderfully glides between various figures of speech (e.g., metaphor, when Ellen explains that the preacher *“(…) goes straight to the green valleys and the streets of silver and gold,”*<sup>116</sup> or simile, when *“That tree in Junior’s yard (..) looks so red it could explode on fire and burn down Junior’s house and barns and everything in them.”*<sup>117</sup>), and a matter-of-fact spoken language: *“It is the kind of dress that decorates you in the front and the back both.”*<sup>118</sup>

We should not forget to mention how Ellen occasionally confuses words or misunderstands their meaning. These instances are usually both amusing and telling. E.g.: When discussing her mother’s illnesses, Ellen imparts to us that her mother had *“romantic fever”* (instead of *“rheumatic fever”*) when she was young. This malapropism results as quite accurate since her mother married beneath her class in what she must have believed to be a romantic escape from her own overbearing mother. The boorishness of Ellen’s father proves her mistake. Similarly, as Ellen picks out her new mama in the church, she naively believes

---

<sup>115</sup> DeMarr, p.44.

<sup>116</sup> Gibbons, p.20.

<sup>117</sup> Gibbons, p.17.

<sup>118</sup> Gibbons, p.98.



her name to be *Foster*. Therefore, she renames herself accordingly when she moves in with her. She does not realize that the "foster" she keeps hearing associated with the woman has to do with her occupation rather than her surname. Yet once again her linguistic error points to truth since "to foster" means to further grow, or, in other words, to nurture.<sup>119</sup>

#### 2.5.4. Dreaming of Women, Falling for Metaphor

Metaphor could hardly be given a greater importance than it receives in *Lying*: "*Metaphor is the greatest gift of language, for through it we can propel what are otherwise wordless experiences into shapes and sounds.*"<sup>120</sup> As the subtitle of the work suggests, metaphor is the narrative device that Slater employs the most. Throughout the memoir, especially epilepsy and Slater's other illnesses are sometimes represented as metaphors, sometimes as real illnesses, sometimes as both at the same time. This produces the semblance of a cluster of lies. " 'Epilepsy' comes to function as the principal metaphor in *Lying* by acting as the nodal point for a cluster of related corporeal states and events. Each of these conditions – which include aura, seizure, fit, spasm, fall, and split – has a metaphorical as well as a literal dimension."<sup>121</sup> For example, Slater remarks: "I didn't know then that the word epilepsy comes from the Greek word epilepsia, which means 'to take, to seize'," and the use of epilepsy as a metaphor for her burgeoning kleptomania ensues: "My body had become epileptic years ago, but when I turned thirteen, so did my soul."<sup>122</sup> Thus Slater seizes – in metaphor and perhaps even in reality – when her mother proves inadequate, when her menstruation commences, when her sainted lover cheats on her. "Our stories are seizures," Slater says. "They clutch

---

<sup>119</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines the verb *to foster*: 1. to bring up; rear. 2. to encourage; cultivate. "To foster" and "to nurture" are synonyms.

<sup>120</sup> Slater, p.219.

<sup>121</sup> Ingram, *ibid.*, (emphasis his).

<sup>122</sup> Slater, p.71, (emphasis hers).

*us up, they are spastic grasps, they are losses of consciousness.*

*Epileptics, every one of us; I am not alone.*"<sup>123</sup>

An image that abounds in the memoir is that of "falling" or "going down." During her seizure (one of her first ones) on the pond while ice skating, Lauren feels as if she "came down out of the sky" and that "the sky was falling" on her.<sup>124</sup> Soon after, Lauren is sent to a special Catholic school in Topeka, where the nuns teach epileptic children to fall without hurting themselves. Here Lauren, who has always felt like a puppet controlled by the strings her mother moves, manages to let go and frees herself of her mother's suffocating grasp. This falling may or may not be literal, however, it is certainly symbolically apt.

When Lauren later remembers Saint Christopher's Convent and learning to fall there, it is "*the one place, the one time, when I had felt confident in my life. (...) Nuns taught me how to cope with life, how to be strong and practical, by scrubbing floors, by washing windows, by baking bread; it was therapy. And it helped.*"<sup>125</sup> There she regains the self-esteem that her mother deprived her of by not loving her as she is. *Falling* becomes an act that gives her confidence and pride. Eventually, she will be searching for the "falling girl" in herself because "*I knew, even though I never could have said it, that the falling skill was widely generalizable, that I would be able to use it for years to come, use it in love, use it in fear, use it in hope. I became, even, a little addicted to falling.*"<sup>126</sup>

Later on, Lauren imagines having a seizure at a funeral and collapsing into the grave in order to spite her mother. Here *falling* becomes a metaphor for acting out of her own will, and it is followed by an even more forcible image of her struggling up out of the grave, which is presented as a kind of birth, symbolizing her entrance into adulthood, and, particularly, her separation from her mother: "*And I climbed up, and up, and, forgive me my imagery, but I emerged, headfirst, and then bellied my way over the ledge of the motherland, and as I did,*

---

<sup>123</sup> Slater, pp.196-197.

<sup>124</sup> Slater, p.30.

<sup>125</sup> Slater, p.207.

<sup>126</sup> Slater, p.55.

*squiggling up, my torso pressed flat against the walls of wet earth, I felt a strange, tender pain in my chest, what I didn't know then – the beginning of breasts.*<sup>127</sup>

Learning to fall, and falling, is like learning and practicing “will B.” “Will B” – as Slater explains to us the thoughts of William James – is “a willingness *instead of a willfulness, an ability to take life on life's terms as opposed to putting up a big fight. It's about being bendable, not brittle, a person who is brave enough to try to ride the waves instead of trying to stop them. (...) It's the kind of will my mother never taught me, and yours probably never taught you either. It's a secret greater than sex; it's a spiritual thing. Will B is not passive. It means an active acceptance, a say yes, and you have to have a voice and courage if you want to learn it.*”<sup>128</sup>

Following manifold falls, Slater eventually closes her memoir with a silent fall to the snowy ground, apprehending that the sense of falling is all that is ultimately, reliably, real. To accept the reality of falling is to embrace the reality of emptiness, and to do that means to find oneself and one's unremitting balance. “*I think you can hold out for only so long. I think secretly each and every one of us longs to fall, and knows in a deep wise place in our brains that surrender is the means by which we gain, not lose, our lives. We know this, and that is why we have bad backs and pulled necks and throbbing pain between our shoulders blades. We want to go down, and it hurts to fight the force of gravity.*”<sup>129</sup>

As Lauren often aches for her mother's loving care, she repeatedly tells us of her dreams of women. Towards the end of the novel she sums up: “*I had a feeling always of missing my mother, a kind of perpetual pang in me, and yet, at the same time, I had lost hope a long time ago. The pang, actually, didn't have so much to do with missing my specific mother, but of missing a mother in general, a warmth or a certain kind of touch. My dreams were always of women; I think they always will be, women lifting me, women touching me, women treading toward me across a pink satin sheet.*”<sup>130</sup>

Similarly, she repeatedly dreams of and enters other homes in order to find the missing comfort. She says: “*Houses hold us, and all that is dear in our worlds. (...) A home has many purposes, but it should primarily be a place where you can cry and run a good fever.*”<sup>131</sup> But

---

<sup>127</sup> Slater, p.59.

<sup>128</sup> Slater, p.53, (emphasis hers).

<sup>129</sup> Slater, p.51.

<sup>130</sup> Slater, p.188, (emphasis hers).

<sup>131</sup> Slater, pp.69-70.

this is not the case of her home. And although she feels peace in other people's houses, she cannot shake off the sense of longing there. Sickrooms, emergency rooms, churches, and also her father's toolshed at moments give her the sense of security and coziness that she is short of. Both the dreams of women and of houses become partially true when Lauren joins the Alcoholic Anonymous group and the women there not only see her and hug her, but also invite her over their thresholds, their homes becoming hers.

Finally, images of holes in her heart, her soul, and her body abound, same as descriptions of feelings of emptiness or heaviness. *"Epilepsy does not mean to be possessed, passively; it means to need to possess, actively. You are born with a hole in you, genetic or otherwise, and so you seize at this and that (...) your mouth so hungry you'll take your own tongue if you have to."* Lauren is constantly lacking or losing something, (at times herself, her own identity). For the main part, it is her mother whom she has lost and that has created the sense of holes. These she tries to fill up by different means. Stealing tchotchkes of other people enables her to feel full for a minute. Inventing illnesses and stories brings her attention and care, yet when she wants to speak truth, she is surrounded by terrible silence. *"I had stolen words, stolen things to fill me, faked fits to fill me, changed my name. (...) [I] tried to fill [the hole] with the intoxicant of illness, the intoxicant of tall tales, the intoxicant of attention lavished on the patient and the poet, me."*<sup>132</sup> Most of these fillings fail her; however, at the end of the novel, Lauren falls in a great hole that opens up in the ground, *"a hole that Lewis Carroll himself had dug,"* and, curiously, *"Alice is there. The queen is there. My mother is there."*<sup>133</sup> This suggests that Lauren has found not only herself and her balance, but she also found peace with her mother.

---

<sup>132</sup> Slater, p.187, (brackets mine).

<sup>133</sup> Slater, p.216, (emphasis mine).

### 2.5.5. Syntax – Loosing Hierarchy, Yet Not One’s Self

Regarding the syntax of *Ellen Foster*, it is important to note the frequent lack of punctuation (“*Her mama tells her to hush little one but I could shut her up for good.*”<sup>134</sup>), especially the total absence of quotation marks in dialogues,<sup>135</sup> which would guide us in respect to who is speaking to whom. Thus we are often left to doubt whether this or that sentence is actually part of a spoken dialogue or whether we are dealing with the heroine’s silent thought. As hierarchy disappears from the text, so does narrative authority. Let us have a look at an example:

*“Her mama and daddy get up from the table and one said they got something for me.*

*For me?*

*You have been a good girl. Right?*

*Lord yes. What is it? Is it in the box? What could it be in a box for me?*

*Open it up. Forget the hocus-pocus said the magician.*

*Open it up!*

*Oh my God it is a sweater. I like it so much. I do not tell a story when I say it does not look colored at all.*

*I think I would like to put it on now if that is OK I can slip it over my shirt and wear it I say and I think I need to cry a little.*

*You want to open your gift while I look or do you want to wait for me to leave?*

*That was mighty sweet of you. You didn’t have to do it.*

*I had to.*

*Well well well, the mama says and gets up to put it on her stove.*

*I can see from here it does look good. It really brightens up the place.*

*I have to go now. I need to get on back home.*

*Stay here. What are you going to do when you get back?*

*Lord I stay busy.*

*You come on back when you want to, he says. Then he wants to know if my daddy is at home today.*

---

<sup>134</sup> Gibbons, p.18.

<sup>135</sup> The vividness of the story is largely due to Gibbon’s frequent use of dialogue. As Maclean points out, dramatic and even theatrical models are constantly used within written narrative. One such model, which stresses the dynamics of performance, is the use of dialogue. Dialogue helps to carry the action along, it mobilizes continuity in time and space. The vast variability of narrative time changes into the artificial chronological stability of performance time. Relationships in space are concentrated into those between the actors, or better to say, actants. “*In other words, dialogue must be seen as an ongoing performance within a performance.*” Maclean, pp.11-12.

*I have not seen hide nor hair.*

*If he's there when you get home you come on back here if you want to. Come on back here, he says.*"<sup>136</sup>

This exemplifies how Gibbons engages the reader. We must read attentively and follow the context in order to understand what is happening. We often remain unable to decide whether this or that sentence was actually uttered or not, or who is its speaker, yet the strategy certainly succeeds in drawing us deeper in.

Fragmented, abbreviated, and run-on sentences further lend credibility to the story as they mirror the style of writing a child would use; moreover, the style one would employ in a diary or an email to a close friend.

Another interesting detail to point out is Ellen's continual use of "OK" that is always capitalized. She uses it both as an expression within sentences, same as a sentence on its own (question or statement). E.g., *"But that is OK now I thought to myself how it did not make much of a difference anymore. (...) And still it was OK by me."*<sup>137</sup> It seems to emphasize Ellen's desire for a normal, orderly life without perpetual worries and pain.

It is interesting to note how Ellen refers to her mother's "*weak self*," how her daddy "*drank his own self*" to death, or how seeing her daddy drunk on the floor makes her want to "*heave [her] own self*." It seems that in traumatic or even uncomfortable moments Ellen separates *herself* into *her self*, literally and figuratively. (In other moments she is simply "*myself*" - no separation. However, she also separates other people in this way, although this is more predominant in the first chapter.) This self is hers, she "owns" it, yet it is implicitly not a part of her, separate from her. This seems to illustrate the moments of trauma are also moments of a division between the self and the situation, as if one were forced into objectivity because subjectively participating in the

---

<sup>136</sup> Gibbons, p.32.

<sup>137</sup> Gibbons, p.66. For further use see e.g., pp.108-109, 112.

experience would damage the self; “owning” it yet not “being“ it permits a safe distance.<sup>138</sup>

#### 2.5.6. *One Mom One Mom, Chop Chop!*

Slater, on the other hand, clearly distinguishes who is speaking to whom or whether we are witnessing her silent thoughts. Similarly to Gibbons, she occasionally omits commas, but she only exceptionally does so with quotation marks. When she leaves out punctuation in the comment: *“I had no friends I made no friends I didn’t care,”*<sup>139</sup> it helps her underscore the stated attitude. Similarly: *“If you had asked me then just why I was afraid, I would have told you, My mother my mother please let her be pleased my mother. (...) I watched her. Please please let her be pleased.”*<sup>140</sup> Herein, the lack of punctuation serves as an emphasis on the repeated words. We can easily picture the author repeating the words to herself as a form of prayer or incantation. The importance of her mother’s satisfaction is obvious. The cited sentences are besides stressed by being written in italics (here underlined). Italics are used throughout the book be it for a word, a phrase or whole sentence. It always functions as an emphasis, and it frequently stresses an idea that is deeply seated in Slater’s mind (like in the example above). Repetition is another narrative device that Slater employs plentifully, repeating words, phrases or whole ideas. *“I did it until I went far away, far, far away to some place silver, and beyond pain,”*<sup>141</sup> she tells us and we can hardly picture anything that would lie farther. Likewise: *“You could’ve heard a pin drop. You could’ve heard the petals fall from a flower while we waited, and waited. Her hands poised over*

---

<sup>138</sup> This and the previous paragraph could probably be inserted in chapter 2.5.3. with similar appropriateness.

<sup>139</sup> Slater, p.141.

<sup>140</sup> Slater, pp.12-13.

<sup>141</sup> Slater, p.28.

*the keys [of the piano].*<sup>142</sup> Here the (repeated) *waiting* is further highlighted by the silence in which it occurs, the silence of expectation.

Regarding the length and complexity of Slater's sentences, they are miscellaneous. Incomplete one or two-word sentences that lack subject or verb alternate the complicated ones. An example from the beginning of the memoir: "*What we did. Deep-sea fishing on a glass-bottomed boat. Caves, where Basien bats hung upside down. Piña coladas, plums in sauce, raw sugar sucked straight from the cane. This is what I remember best about Barbados. The sugarcane. Everywhere we drove there were fields and fields of it, stalks harvested under hot sun by men with small machetes. Chop chop. Castles of sugar and sweat.*"<sup>143</sup> The strength of this passage lies in its ability to appeal to all our senses almost simultaneously through the use of immediate impressions that have been rid of unnecessary adjectives and verbs. The sweet taste, the smell of sweat, the chopping sound, the sight of "*fields and fields*" - the fragmentary sentences invite the reader to indulge in the sensuous without being disrupted by complicated syntax.

---

<sup>142</sup> Slater, p.19, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>143</sup> Slater, p.13.



### 3. RELATIONSHIPS

*"Suffering is the acid test of our ability to exhibit concern, compassion, and healing and, therefore, is always about relationships. In this view, suffering cannot be intrinsically evil because it can never be plucked from a social context. Even torture—an extreme example of fortuitous suffering—is evil, not for the pain it inflicts but for its attempt to undermine the victim's belief in relationships."*

- Michael Nutkiewicz<sup>144</sup>

#### 3.1. MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

*"Since Adrienne Rich's oft quoted statement that the 'cathexis between mother and daughter . . . is the great unwritten story,' the significance of the mother-daughter relationship has been recognized by feminist theorists from diverse theoretical approaches. No longer an unwritten story in white feminist scholarship, there is now a rich resource of interdisciplinary scholarly studies on this relationship crossing the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, and literary criticism and which includes within its bounds the study of motherhood as an institution."*

- Hilary Crew<sup>145</sup>

A groundbreaking book in this respect is Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Ever since it was published in 1978, it has shaped feminist literary criticism, and moreover, we could say that it has put the mother-daughter relationship and female psychology on the map. Similarly to other feminist revisions of psychoanalytical theories, Chodorow has emphasized the importance of the mother's early relation to her daughter in shaping their relationship. Mothers are and have been the child's primary caretaker, socializer, and inner object; fathers on the other hand, are

---

<sup>144</sup> Nutkiewicz, Michael: *Towards an Ethic of Suffering: A Rejoinder to Jamie Mayerfeld*, In: *APS Bulletin*, Nov./Dec. 2002, vol.12, No.6, <http://www.ampainsoc.org/pub/bulletin/nov02/path1.htm>. For an illuminating analysis of the structure of torture see: Scarry, Elaine: *The Body in Pain, The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

<sup>145</sup> Crew, Hilary: *Feminist Theories and the Voices of Mothers and Daughters in Selected African-American Literature for Young Adults*, 1994, <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/books/CREW65.pdf>, (emphasis mine). Crew quotes Rich from Rich, Adrienne: *Of Woman Born*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1976, p.225. In her essay, Crew discusses 'a network of othermothers' that could perhaps be relevantly explored in relation to *Ellen Foster*.

and remain secondary objects both for girls and boys.<sup>146</sup> Fathers never present themselves to children with the same force as mothers, nor are they involved with them in the same way and to the same extent.<sup>147</sup> Mother-child relationship is therefore exclusive and more intense.<sup>148</sup>

Drawing on psychoanalytic research, Chodorow further stresses the continued importance of a girl's external and internal relation to her mother, and the way her father is added to this relation. In other words, she argues that girls do not give up attachment to their mothers in forming a relationship with the father, but rather define themselves in a relational triangle with both mother and father. *"This process entails a relational complexity in feminine self-definition and personality which is not characteristic of masculine self-definition or personality."*<sup>149</sup>

Chodorow also maintains that less distinct boundaries are drawn between mothers and daughters than between mothers and sons. *"Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others."*<sup>150</sup> Put differently, *"the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate."*<sup>151</sup>

Furthermore, Chodorow explores patterns of fusion, projection, narcissistic extension, and denial of separateness in various clinical cases and claims that these patterns are more likely to happen in early mother-daughter relationships than in those of mothers and sons. Unlike in relation to the son, *"the mother does not recognize or denies the existence of the daughter as a separate person, and the daughter herself then comes not to recognize, or to have difficulty recognizing, herself as a separate person. She experiences herself, rather, as a continuation or extension of (...) her mother in particular, and later of*

---

<sup>146</sup> Chodorow, Nancy: *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, p.92.

<sup>147</sup> Chodorow, p.140.

<sup>148</sup> Chodorow, p.96.

<sup>149</sup> Chodorow, p.93.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Chodorow, p.169.

*the world in general.*<sup>152</sup> These issues are then revived during the girl's puberty and adolescence and they move with her into adulthood.

Analysts agree that adolescent transition is more difficult and conflictual for girls than for boys as boys generally resolve their oedipal complex much earlier in life while girls in puberty still have their entanglement in familial relationships to confront before they can develop extrafamilial commitments.<sup>153</sup> Mother-daughter relationship at this moment is characterized by mutual ambivalence that causes more anxiety in the daughter and provokes attempts to break away from the mother. Helene Deutsch suggests that this situation convinces the mother and daughter that any separation between them will result in disaster to both.<sup>154</sup> Alice Balint concurs and describes a possible expression of this ambivalence in mothers: *"Coldness on the mother's part may, because of the child's unappeased love for her, prevent the requisite loosening of the bond between them. The child will still eternally seek, even when grown up, for a mother-substitute, and bring a childish, immature love to the relationship."*<sup>155</sup>

The central issue for a girl in prepubertal period is therefore a struggle for psychological liberation from her mother. *"Her father – loved or rejected, experienced as powerful or weak – is emotionally in the background."*<sup>156</sup> The ease of a gender-role identification and the feeling of continuity with her mother conflict with a girl's need and desire to separate from her and to overcome her ambivalent and dependant relationship. A daughter can often act as if she is and feels herself unconsciously one with her mother. Both mothers and daughters experience themselves as overly attached, unindividuated, and without boundaries.<sup>157</sup>

Prepubertal girls use different ploys in order to effect their individuation and independence. A girl often becomes very critical of her

---

<sup>152</sup> Chodorow, p.103.

<sup>153</sup> Chodorow, p.135.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. Chodorow here draws on Deutsch, Helen: *Psychology of Women*, New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. Chodorov cites Balint from Balint, Alice: *The Early Years of Life: A Psychoanalytic Study*, New York: Basic Books, 1954, p.90.

<sup>156</sup> Chodorow, p.136.

mother and idealizes the mother of a friend. Trying to overcome her ambivalent dependence and sense of oneness she might split the good and bad aspects of objects, ascribing the bad qualities to her mother and home, the good ones to extrafamilial world.<sup>158</sup> Alternatively, a girl may attempt to be unlike her mother in every imaginable way. Many prepubertal girls solve this issue by finding a “best friend” whom they love and with whom they identify. This friendship allows them to continue to experience merging, while at the same time denying feelings of merging with their mothers.<sup>159</sup>

*“All these attempts involve oscillations in emotions and ambivalence. A girl alternates between total rejection of a mother who represents infantile dependence and attachment to her, between identification with anyone other than her mother and feeling herself her mother’s double and extension. Her mother often mirrors her preoccupations.”<sup>160</sup>*

In *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, published in 1989, Chodorow adds that the strength and quality of the mother-daughter relationship completely determines the strength and quality of the father-daughter relationship. Moreover, she delves into an examination of (un)satisfactory mothering:

*“Satisfactory mothering, which does not reproduce particular psychological problems in boys and girls, comes from a person with a firm sense of self and of her own value, whose care is a freely chosen activity rather than a reflection of a conscious and unconscious sense of inescapable connection to and responsibility for her children.”<sup>161</sup>*

A daughter’s identification with her mother in this situation is with a strong woman that exercises clear control over important spheres of life, and whose sense of self-esteem reflects this. *“Acceptance of her gender identity involves positive valuation of herself, and not an admission of inferiority.”<sup>162</sup>* However, this is not the case when we look at the situation of the Western middle-class housewife. Here we look at

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. Lauren Slater is a perfect example of such a daughter. See chapter 3.3.

<sup>158</sup> Lauren seems to demonstrate this at various points of the narrative. Ellen seems to idealize (some) other *mamas* but her incentives are different. She simply misses her mother and needs a *good* substitute. See chapters 3.2. and 3.3.

<sup>159</sup> Chodorow, pp.137-138. Chodorow again draws on Deutsch, *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Chodorow, p.138.

<sup>161</sup> Chodorow, Nancy: *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p.59.

a mother who is usually isolated with her children for most of her workday and thus she lacks contacts and relations that would help fulfill her psychological and social needs. Child-care is considered her crucially important responsibility.

*"It is not surprising, then, that she is likely to invest a lot of anxious energy and guilt in her concern for her children and to look to them for her own self-affirmation, or that her self-esteem, dependant on the lives of others than herself, is shaky. Her life situation leads her to an over-involvement in her children's lives."*

*"A mother in this situation keeps her daughter from differentiation and from lessening her infantile dependence. (...) And there are not other people around to mediate in the mother-daughter relationship."<sup>163</sup>*

Chodorow concludes that it is difficult for daughters in a Western middle-class family to develop self-esteem. To her daughter, the mother inevitably represents regression, passivity, dependence, and lack of orientation to reality.<sup>164</sup>

Having Chodorow's assertions in mind, we will now explore the mother-daughter relationships and their substitutes in our novels.

---

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p.63. This could be Ellen's future with her "new mama."

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., pp.63-64. "Insofar as the father is actively involved in a relationship with his daughter and his daughter develops some identification with him, this helps her individuation." However, this is not the case of our heroines as their fathers are either abusive or inefficient.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.64.

### 3.2. MAMAS & THEIR LACK – ELLEN’S QUEST

*"Her name was Shine, which is exactly what she did through all the heat and poverty and the sad certainty that life would not be any other way. Her strength was a fine thing to see, to remember. If I had not known that strength, that pure perseverance, I could not have become a writer. I would have chosen something that takes far less courage."*

*- Kaye Gibbons<sup>165</sup>*

As we have said above, Ellen’s mother committed suicide when Ellen was ten years old. It might have been that Ellen’s mother, like Shine (Gibbon’s mother), was a woman of exceptional strength and vigor. However, when we get to meet her briefly at the beginning of the novel, she is debilitated, both physically and mentally, by a prolonged illness and the treatment she has been receiving from her abusive husband:

*"She comes in the door [returning from the hospital] and he asks about supper right off. What does she have planned? he wants to know. (...) She would look at him square in the face but not at his eyes or mouth but at his whole face and the ugliness getting out through the front. On he goes about supper and how come weeds are growed up in the yard. (...) She stands between his mean highness and the television set looking at him make words at her. (...) she is too limp and too sore to get up the breath to push the words out to stop it all. She just stands there and lets him work out his evil on her."<sup>166</sup>*

Therefore, she is no longer able to care for her daughter. On the contrary, Ellen must take care of her. The roles of mother and daughter are thus disturbingly reversed from the very beginning of the story. Ellen firstly only helps her mother to reach the tall things, yet a minute later she assists her in taking her clothes off and getting her into bed, just as a mother would normally do with a young child: *"We peel her dress off over the head and slip on something loose to sleep in."<sup>167</sup>*

Notwithstanding, Ellen’s father, despite putting on airs, is not much stronger than his wife. While he compensates for his low self-esteem with aggression, Ellen rightly recognizes *"a big mean baby"* in him rather than a grown man, a baby that needs *"firm"* discipline. *"Get on up*

---

<sup>165</sup> Gibbons, Kaye: *How I Became a Writer: My Mother, Literature, and a Life Split Neatly into Two Halves: A Nonfiction Piece*, Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1988, p.6.

<sup>166</sup> Gibbons, Kaye: *Ellen Foster*, p.2, (brackets mine). The following references to the authoress relate to this book.

<sup>167</sup> Gibbons, p.5.

*I say again to him. You got to be firm when he is like this. He'd lay there and rot if I let him...*<sup>168</sup> says Ellen when she sees her drunken father on the bathroom floor.

While Ellen is firm with her father, she treats her mother gently and lovingly. The fact that a ten-year-old child is expected to parent both her parents is surely odd and disquieting. However, the most disturbing is that Ellen also has to serve as her mother's protector. *"I try not to leave her by herself with him. Not even when they are both asleep in the bed. My baby crib is still up in their bedroom so when I hear them at night I throw a fit and will not stop until I can sleep in the baby bed. He will think twice when I am around"*<sup>169</sup> By climbing into her crib in order to protect her mother, Ellen not only becomes a parent and protector, but simultaneously regresses to infancy. The bitter truth that the screaming child in a crib is the only one who will make her father *"think twice"* can certainly be perceived as symbolic of the disturbingly reversed parent-child roles in their family.

That Ellen's father is no caregiver, and therefore cannot substitute for the missing mother later on, is clearly shown already in the opening paragraphs of the novel. *"When I was little I would think of ways to kill my daddy. (...) But I did not kill my daddy. He drank his own self to death the year after the County moved me out. (...) All I did was wish him dead real hard every now and then. And I can say for a fact that I am better off now than when he was alive."*<sup>170</sup> The many different names that Ellen calls him – e.g., *"old hog, his nasty self, his lazy self, wind-up toy of a man, the one that is too sorry to talk back to, trash, monster, mistake for a person"* etc. – further strengthen our bad impression of him and our suspense as to what horrible things he has done to his girls. Learning these, we can no longer be surprised that Ellen likes *"to take the notion to spit on his fork,"*<sup>171</sup> or even figure out the ways to kill him. But Ellen is not only enraged by her father's character and behavior, she is also repelled by him and ashamed of

---

<sup>168</sup> Gibbons, p.6.

<sup>169</sup> Gibbons, p.8.

<sup>170</sup> Gibbons, p.1.

<sup>171</sup> Gibbons, p.4.

him. She would not touch her hands to him when he is drunk nor would she show up at a restaurant with him.<sup>172</sup>

When Ellen is deprived of her (potentially) nurturing mother figure due to her illness and her father's abuse of her, matters get considerably worse for our heroine. In addition to preparing the food and taking control of paying the bills, her father also expects Ellen to take her mother's place sexually. In chapter six he literally mistakes her for her mother, calling her by her mother's name: "*Get away from me he does not listen to me but touches his hands harder on me. That is not me. Oh no that was her name. Do not oh you do not say her name to me (...) I am Ellen.*"<sup>173</sup> From then on Ellen keeps her door barricaded and only slips in and out through the window. Besides living with the trauma of her mother's suicide, she daily faces the danger of being physically and sexually abused. "*I will just have to lock myself up is what I thought. (...) Push the chair up to the door and keep something in there to hit with just in case. (...) I became the champion of not breathing or blinking to be heard. Somebody else calling out sugar blossom britches might sound sweet but it was nasty from him. He could make anything into trash.*"<sup>174</sup> Shocking as it is, it reflects the most extreme example of the many ways in which young Ellen is expected to take on the role of an adult woman long before she is ready to do so.

No matter how attentively we read, we find very few moments prior to Ellen's stay in the foster home when Ellen is allowed to behave as a child.<sup>175</sup> One of these is Ellen's recurring memory of working with her mother in the garden. It is a beautiful and soothing recollection suggestive of the type of nurture that Ellen is searching for. As Ellen describes her mother's tender care of the garden she says: "*She nursed all the plants and put even the weeds she pulled up in little piles along the rows. My job was to pick the piles up and dispose of them. I was*

---

<sup>172</sup> Gibbons, pp.6 and 25.

<sup>173</sup> Gibbons, p.38.

<sup>174</sup> Gibbons, pp.43-44.

<sup>175</sup> "*So Ellen Foster looks at that [Starletta having the possibility of and being a child] and longs to be that way, but she can't be that way because she's too busy trying to make sure her own needs are met.*" Kaye Gibbons in Jordan, Shirley Marie: *Kaye Gibbons*, In: *Broken*



*small my own self and did not have the sense to tell between weeds and plants. I just worked in the trail my mama left.*<sup>176</sup> In this rare case, nobody counts upon Ellen to take on the responsibilities of an adult. Rather, she is given her own, and most importantly, age-appropriate job, and it is her mother who tends the plants and leaves a trail in which her little daughter can work. The importance of this memory for Ellen's coping is apparent from her confession that:

*"I know I have made being in the garden with her into a regular event but she was really only well like that for one season.*

*You see if you tell yourself the same tale over and over again enough times then the tellings become separate stories and you will generally fool yourself into forgetting you only started with one solitary season out of your life.*

*That is how I do it.*<sup>177</sup>

Again, Ellen proves very resourceful, this time in making her mama more present and the past more accommodating. However, her inventiveness reveals her deep grief.

In the scene of her "mama's" death, Ellen would like to behave as a child: *"I always want to lay here. (...) I push my head down by her side. And I will crawl in and make room for myself. (...) I have her now while she sleeps but just is not breathing."* Yet again she must act as the caregiver, and that not only for her mama but also for herself: *"I will stay here with you. Just for a nap I will stay here with you. (...) We will rest some more. The day is early and we need some more rest. (...) My heart can be the one that beats. And hers has stopped."* Herein, Ellen expresses two contradictory desires: in the first place, she wants to return to the safety of the mother's womb where she was fed; in the second place, she wishes to take over the life-sustaining role of the mother's heartbeat and nourishing bloodstream. *"You can rest with me until somebody comes to get you. We will not say anything. We can rest."*<sup>178</sup> While her "mama" begins her eternal rest, Ellen postpones full acknowledgement of her death by stressing this repose, by

---

*Silences: Interviews with Black and White Women Writers*, New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993, p.69, (brackets mine).

<sup>176</sup> Gibbons, p.49.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Gibbons, pp.5, 9 and 10.

transforming eternal rest into a regular daily relaxation. However, Ellen is not trying to fool herself, but manages to soothe herself for the moment as there is nobody else who would do this for her.

As we have seen, neither of Ellen's parents provide her with the nurturing shelter which she, as a child, naturally needs, nor does Ellen's extended family. While Ellen's aunts are wholly unwilling to care for her, her grandmother, besides failing to offer her grandchild the love and care Ellen seeks, repeats the mistakes of Ellen's parents by expecting her to take on the responsibilities of an adult. *"And through all the churning and spinning I saw her face. A big clown smile looking down at me while she said to me you best take better care of me than you did of your mama."*<sup>179</sup> Here, similarly to the scenes with Ellen's father, the adults in Ellen's life are reduced to absurd, childlike figures, which further emphasizes the recurrent reversal of roles in the novel. Her grandmother is pictured as a *"big clown"* who saddles Ellen with the adult responsibility of caring for a dying woman.

Furthermore, just as Ellen's father began to see her mother in her, Ellen's grandmother sees her father in her and transfers all the hate and resentment of him onto her. Looking at Ellen, she does not perceive a young girl and the child of her beloved daughter, but the accomplice of the hideous man who robbed her of her child. Playing on Ellen's own guilt over her mother's death, she blames her for being *"in cahoots"* with her father and even accuses her of having helped him to murder her mother. She refuses to notice, let alone acknowledge, that Ellen was only a child and therefore incapable of confronting her violent father, who threatened her with a knife.

When Ellen is ordered by court to leave her brief respite from adult responsibilities in the home of her art teacher Julia and her boyfriend Roy, and she is sent to her wicked grandmother, she makes the following comment about her family: *"What do you do when the judge talks about the family society's cornerstone but you know yours was never a Roman pillar but is and always has been crumbly old brick?"*<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Gibbons, p.73.

<sup>180</sup> Gibbons, p.56.

Contrasting with this negative example of a family there are two positive ones to be discovered throughout the novel – that of Starletta’s and Mavis’s families (both being African-American).

The parents of Starletta are the first ones to offer Ellen shelter from her abusive father. They are also the only ones who give her a Christmas present (Ellen buys herself all her other gifts), and offer to feed her on Christmas Day. Just as Ellen’s “*new mama*” will later refuse the money Ellen has saved over the time, Starletta’s mother takes Ellen in when she needs protection and tells her to “*put [her] money up that they do not take money from children.*”<sup>181</sup> They are the first people to recognize that Ellen is only a child and still needs to be nurtured and protected.

Mavis’s family provides a similar example of a loving home. While eavesdropping on her family, Ellen starts a list of everything that a family should have:

*“Of course there is the mama and the daddy but if one has to be missing then it is OK if the one left can count for two. But not just anybody can count for more than his or her self. While I watched Mavis and her family I thought I would bust open if I did not get one of them for my own self soon. (...) I only wanted one white and with a little more money. At least we can have running water is what I thought.”*<sup>182</sup>

Although Ellen has been forced to assume many adult responsibilities, she is not yet mature enough to make adult judgments. As the example above demonstrates, Ellen is unable to recognize that the nurturing qualities of the above-mentioned families are not diminished by their skin color. With time and experience, Ellen will realize that it was Starletta’s family that offered her shelter when her own father threatened her.

*“I wonder to myself am I the same girl who would not drink after Starletta two years ago or eat a colored biscuit when I was starved? It is the same girl but I am old now I know it is not the germs you cannot see that slide off her lips and on to a glass then to your white lips that will hurt you or turn you colored. What you had better worry about though is the people you know and trusted they would be like you because you were all made in the same batch. You need to look over your shoulder at the one who is in*

---

<sup>181</sup> Gibbons, p.39, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>182</sup> Gibbons, p.67.

*charge of holding you up and see if that is a knife he has in his hand. And it might not be a colored hand. But it is a knife.*<sup>183</sup>

However, in order that Ellen can figure this out, she must first encounter a parent who will nurture her as a child and permit her to mature at a natural pace. Having learned that blood ties do not necessarily nurture, Ellen tries a nontraditional family and throws herself at the mercy of a woman who takes foster children. In this way, she discovers her “*new mama*.” As she settles in the foster home, she finally wins someone to care for her and love her. Describing the life in the foster home Ellen says: “*Nobody yells after anybody to do this or that here. (...) Nobody has died or blamed me for anything worse than over-watering the terrarium. But you can always stick some more ferns in the dirt. My new mama said it was not the end of the world.*”<sup>184</sup> Here, Ellen's only responsibilities are age-appropriate, as they were while working in the garden with her mother. Once again she acquires a mother in whose path she can work. Having reached this safe, nurturing home, Ellen can mature and progress to the adult responsibilities of caring for others. Putting her prejudices aside she can reach out to Starletta and realize that her own difficult childhood has not been “*the hardest row to hoe.*”<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> Gibbons, p.85. It is interesting to note that the author does not avoid the cliché pattern of the contemporary Southern literature in which a white protagonist (Ellen) attains moral growth through a relationship with a black character (Starletta). This kind of relationship can be traced back to Huck and Jim. Abernathy, Jeff: *Passing through Darkness: Sara Flanigan and Kaye Gibbons: Search for Hope*, In: Same: *To Hell and Back: Race and Betrayal in the Southern Novel*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003, p.108.

<sup>184</sup> Gibbons, pp.4 and 121.

<sup>185</sup> Gibbons, p.126. The imagery here again recalls Ellen's favorite memory of growing beans with her mother and indicates that she perceives woman's lot as hard, but she can lend a hand to

### 3.3. ONE MOM, EMPTINESS AND LAUREN'S WORDS

*"My relationship with my father was placid but fairly distant. His way of coping with the crises on the homefront was to absent himself, physically and emotionally. I don't remember him around a lot. As for my two sisters, they were treated quite differently than I. My mother adored my younger sister and treated my older sister with respect. However, they did not escape the trauma that comes from witnessing the cruelty she inflicted on myself and others. Their scars are different, but, I'm sure, deep."*

*- Lauren Slater<sup>186</sup>*

While Ellen's mother disappeared from her daughter's life too soon, Lauren's mother has never completely left it, despite ever *really being there*. What we mean is that Lauren's mother kept exercising great power over the life of her daughter, yet she has never given her the love and attention Lauren so much needed and desired.<sup>187</sup> Both girls were thus doomed to spend their adolescence in search of their *mamas'* substitutes. However, Lauren had to deal with the trauma of having her mother both present and absent at the same time, constantly trying to either escape her or regain her, which proved to be an exhaustive, long-distance run.

The importance of the mother-daughter relationship in Slater's memoir is clearly shown in the scope and treatment it receives in the first chapters of the book. As Lauren grows up and their paths separate, the mother disappears from the pages, although not from the story. Her figure reverberates throughout the book as an ominous undercurrent.

Lauren begins her story by introducing us her beautiful jasmine world which immediately stands in a striking opposition to her family world:

*"The summer I turned ten I smelled jasmine everywhere I went. (...) As the summer went on, the jasmine world grew; other odors entered, sometimes a smell of burning, as though the whole house were coming down."*

---

the next woman down the trail, like Mavis did, so that everybody will be fed.

<sup>186</sup> From an *Author Interview* at [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/prozac\\_diary-author.asp#top](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/prozac_diary-author.asp#top), Courtesy of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

<sup>187</sup> Chodorow's discussion of the way a certain sort of psychotic mother inflicts her pathology predominantly on daughters seems to be relevant here. She writes: "*Having denied their daughters the stability and security of a confident early symbiosis, they turned around and refused to allow them any leeway for separateness or individuation. Instead, they now treated their daughters and cathected them as narcissistic physical and mental extensions of themselves (...)*" Chodorow: *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p.100.

*Which, in a way, it was. There were my mother and father, both of whom I loved – that much is true – but my father was too small, my mother too big, and occasionally, when the jasmine came on, I would also feel a lightheadedness that made my mother seem even bigger, my father even smaller, so he was the size of a freckle, she higher than a house, all her hair flying.”<sup>188</sup>*

The dominant position of the mother in the household is clear, the same as the situation it creates. The mother is moreover extremely narcissistic while the father gave up on being anything more than ineffectual and therefore passive.

Not surprisingly, the hardly noticeable father is characterized with one sentence while a couple of paragraphs are dedicated to the mother in the introduction of both parents. We learn that he was a Hebrew School teacher, while she was “*many things, a round-robin tennis player with an excellent serve, a hostess, a housewife, a schemer, an ideologue, she wanted to free the Russian Jews, educate the Falashas, fly on the Concorde, drink at the Ritz.*” She was a woman of high standards, grand gestures and desires that the father – failure of a husband – could not afford to fulfil. She was a delusional woman: “*She told me she was a Holocaust survivor, a hot-air balloonist, a personal friend of Golda Meir.*”<sup>189</sup> The father is so vapid but also has such a little importance in the story on the whole that Slater has no need to introduce him any further. Throughout the book we will learn little more about him than that he is private and shy, plays pinochle and prays, “*can’t even figure out how to hold a hammer,*”<sup>190</sup> and generally is “*not a man who requires room,*”<sup>191</sup> as the mother declares.

Similarly to Ellen’s father, Lauren’s mother has a drinking problem. “*She did drink, but not at the Ritz. She drank in the den or in her bedroom, always with an olive in her glass.*”<sup>192</sup> However, as opposed to Ellen’s father, Lauren’s mother has much loftier demands on her little one. A woman of big aspiration and little fulfillment, she shifts some of her dreams onto her daughter (as parents so often do), and insists that

---

<sup>188</sup> Slater, pp.4-5.

<sup>189</sup> Slater, p.5.

<sup>190</sup> Slater, p.71.

<sup>191</sup> Slater, p.6.

<sup>192</sup> Slater, p.5.

Lauren follows in the footsteps of Dorothy Hamill or Estelle Drier and becomes a professional figure skater. Lauren wants to make her mother happy and the mother believes she has potential, so they take onto *“a sport of bones and grace, a sport where you fly on water like a prophet but fall, sphincter first, on the solidest surface. It hurts and you have to push yourself. You have to push yourself first to go out in the cold, and then (...) to leap against your better judgment, when your whole self is longing just to nap. (...) ‘Spin,’ she would shout and I did it. The more it hurt, the better I was. (...) I did it, even when my lungs burned and my lips lost all their moisture; I did it until I went far away, far, far away to some place silver, and beyond pain.”*<sup>193</sup>

Lauren and her mother are very different both in character and behavior. However, deep inside, Lauren feels a hidden, or even repressed, likeness. Lauren tells us that *“hers [mother’s] was a household of dream and muscle both.”* The mother was a driven woman who never knew the pleasure of a stretch and who believed you could conquer anything through will. While Lauren was a spontaneous, playful, careless child, her mother was demanding, strict, and overbearing. *“‘Lazy,’ my mother said. (...) ‘Get out there and do something.’ What she meant was do something gorgeous with your life.”*<sup>194</sup> But Lauren enjoys playing in the woods where she can drift and have no worries. One day, as she returns home, she is *“filthy”*, and her mother slaps her hard. Yet at the same time, with *“a longing in her look,”* she smudges her pinkie to Lauren’s soiled face and looks at the dirt *“like it was chocolate.”*<sup>195</sup> Likewise, Lauren says her mother couldn’t lower herself to partake in eating lobster that required bibs and scraping green gunk, yet *“I could tell she wanted to, though, the same way I could tell she secretly longed to walk with me in the woods, to take in soil, to sleep the heavy, sweaty sleep of the rude and the relaxed.”*<sup>196</sup>

Even Lauren’s grand mals seem to represent her mother’s inner struggle:

*“When a seizure rolled through me, it didn’t feel like mine; it felt like hers – her ramrod body sweetening into spasm. She gave it all to me, and I returned it to her, this*

---

<sup>193</sup> Slater, p.28.

<sup>194</sup> Slater, p.9, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>195</sup> Slater, p.10.

<sup>196</sup> Slater, p.16.

wild, rollicking, hopeful life, this Chuck Berry blast, all striving sunk to the bottom of the brain's deep sea; crack a claw, Mom.<sup>197</sup> "Sometimes, after I'd woken up from a seizure, I felt so sorry for her. I felt it was really she who'd had the seizure, she whose muscles really ached, and over and over again in my mind, I brought my mother milk."<sup>198</sup>

Lauren becomes a worried child, too often preoccupied with her mother's happiness:

"I watched her. Please please let her be pleased. When the captain pointed out the coral, I looked for the movements of pleasure in her mouth, but found none. I watched her like I should have watched my sinking sickening self. I watched her like I now, an amateur gardener, watch the weather when it might be bad. (...) If you had asked me then just why I was afraid, I would have told you, My mother my mother please let her be pleased my mother."<sup>199</sup>

However, Lauren's mother is impossible to satisfy. As Lauren practices ice skating, desperately trying to manage all the different maneuvers her mother commands her to do, she eventually fails both in pleasing her mother the same as in winning the love she so badly seeks and needs from her. She then wants to get her mother a gift but ends up frustrated as "none of it would do." When her father gives his surprise to the mother, Slater states: "I think he loved her, or, like me, her unhappiness was his."<sup>200</sup> However, at the doctor after her first epileptic seizure (during which her mother never appeared to nurse her!), Lauren discovers a small smile on her mother's face and realizes how, through illness, she "might be able to give her good food."<sup>201</sup>

"Even before the smells and sights and, later, the terrible slamming seizures, even before all this, my mother thought I was doomed, which, in her scheme of things, was much better than being mediocre."<sup>202</sup>

Being epileptic, at first, seems to be special and is admired by the mother. "She has epilepsy, but so did van Gogh, you know," she whispers to her friends. "(...) a change came over her, she seemed to

---

<sup>197</sup> Slater, p.24.

<sup>198</sup> Slater, p.37.

<sup>199</sup> Slater, pp.12-13, (emphasis hers). Helen Deutsch documents many experiences of boundary confusion or equation of self and other in mother-daughter relationships, e.g., guilt and self-blame for the other's unhappiness; shame and embarrassment at the other's actions etc. Chodorow: *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, p.58.

<sup>200</sup> Slater, p.11.

<sup>201</sup> Slater, p.22.

<sup>202</sup> Slater, p.10.



*almost like the illness. (...) I saw her looking at me with wishes in her eyes, as though she, too, might like to drop and thrash, to break the brittle caul of cleanliness and artifice.*” Through her illness, Lauren brings back the natural world that her mother has lost. *“She touched my head gently now, like it was hot (...), like it was whatever she was not, a wild and totally true world in there, a place she had forsaken for artifice, etiquette, marriage, mediocre love, and which I had returned to her; here, Mom; have my head.”*<sup>203</sup>

Notwithstanding, being *“this grand mal”* soon equals being *“this big badness”* again, vain are the attempts to be the mother’s girl instead of a wrong girl. Lauren soon becomes *“just a person with a disease.”* Reading Slater’s description of a seizure, it feels as if she was characterizing her struggle for mother’s love and acceptance.

*“You grit your teeth, you clench, (...) you hit hard and spew, you grind your teeth with such a force you might wake up with a mouth full of molar dust, tooth ash, the residue of words you’ve never spoken, but should have. You bite your mouth – I do at least – chew it to pieces from the inside out, a mythical hunger, my whole self jammed into my jaw.”*<sup>204</sup>

Nonetheless, her mother proves simply incapable of bestowing this great, filling love on her only (in the memoir) daughter and her reason is plain – she is dissatisfied, the world does not fit with what she has envisioned. Although this dissatisfaction is not necessarily rooted entirely in her daughter, it sometimes shows up there. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a daughter to live up to everything her mother expects.<sup>205</sup>

Ultimately, Slater, as an adolescent girl, figures out that her mother is unable to deliver the kind of approval we all innately seek and so she moves on to other places. One morning, her father makes her an egg and tells her a story of a rabbi in Jerusalem in order to teach Lauren that she should not be ashamed of herself, or her sickness.

---

<sup>203</sup> Slater, p.23.

<sup>204</sup> Slater, p.19.

<sup>205</sup> It is also interesting to consider the opposing issue of whether we are able to experience our mothers in any manner other than how they measured up against our expectations. For an illuminating discussion of blame and idealization of mothers see *The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother* in Chodorow: *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*.

*“And I felt comfort come from a place where I had never even sought it, not from my mother, but from this man, who that morning made me an egg. (...) If comfort could come from him, then it must be hidden in other places too. This is what I started to realize, the wisdom that would, finally, lead me away from her. Comfort must rest within other people’s palms, in their flower beds, in the saucers they keep stacked on painted kitchen shelves.”*<sup>206</sup>

Searching for this comfort, Lauren begins by imagining living in another house – a house where girls ate eggs *“with toast their mothers had made”* and where they *“could sleep instead of skate.”*<sup>207</sup> She then moves onto ringing the doorbells in the neighborhood and peering inside the space she might enter, eventually entering and stealing ostensive trifles. Nevertheless, in order to attain the attention of other human beings, she must first learn to fall.

We have said that Lauren’s mother exerts manifold and consistent power over her life. Lauren’s recurrent feeling that she is a marionette reflects this explicitly:

*“I was not a girl at all, but a marionette, and some huge hand – my mother’s hand? – held me up, and for a reason I absolutely could not predict, that hand might let the strings go slack, oh, God.”*<sup>208</sup>

*“I did everything I could to be good. [At the school for epileptics] (...) I could learn it all except for falling, because I was a marionette, and even hundreds of miles away, it was her huge hand that held me up.”*<sup>209</sup>

Trying to separate herself from her mother, Lauren invents secret games and words. *“Vag was the word I used, my own private word for vagina. Even back then I had private words, places apart from my mother. (...) Sometimes I wanted to go and live in a place apart forever, a place where I could roll around in the dirt and lick things.”*<sup>210</sup> It is vastly frustrating for Slater that she can neither detach herself from her mother, nor access her. *“My mother had a mole which she tried every day to cover with cream, but its blackness bled through, a little tip of dark, and that was the only part of her I could ever think to touch.”*<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Slater, p.39.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Slater, p.31.

<sup>209</sup> Slater, p.50, (brackets mine).

<sup>210</sup> Slater, p.32.

<sup>211</sup> Slater, p.33. It is interesting to notice how Lauren later appreciates Jesus Christ, particularly his approachability: *“I loved his heart, how he made it so available.”* Slater, p.45.

Thus her mother is only reachable through artifice, never truly, which is perhaps why her grasp has such a suffocating effect too. “*‘One one one,’ I chanted, which meant you’re the one, the only one, the one mom one mom one mom, until I felt I would choke.*”<sup>212</sup>

At first, this “perfect” mother, who “grills” her daughter about what happened at every session with the psychologist, seems impossible to betray. However, when her mother applies “*Startle and Shake Response*” on her in the supermarket and people see it as a child abuse, Lauren refuses to confirm to the police that she is an epileptic. “*(...) and while I felt guilt, I also saw it was possible to betray her. After all, she was still standing.*”<sup>213</sup> This is an important moment in the memoir as it is the first one in which Lauren opposes her mother. Thanks to that, she is sent to “*the school for falling children*” where she betrays her mother again by learning to fall: “*I learned to buckle my knees and let myself loose, slipping southward, away from her, betraying her, yes, I did it, all my muscles slack.*”<sup>214</sup> Furthermore, passing “*a crash course in learning to live apart*” as she calls it, she becomes much stronger and self-reliant; thus also gaining self-confidence, which her mother continually nibbles away at. However, by now she does so with less vigor: “*Since I’d come back, she had changed as well. She had gotten weaker. Or maybe she had always been this weak, but I saw it more. (...) and she had less of interest in me. She said I would never be a skating star.*”<sup>215</sup>

After completing a month at the school – where she shines in the love of Catholic nuns who take care of the children - she knows how to fall without injury, and begins to experiment with inducing and faking seizures. As she explains to us, this kind of behavior is known as “*Munchausen’s syndrome, otherwise called factitious illness, the patient faking not for money but for things beyond weight, beyond measure.*”<sup>216</sup> At first, she only uses this skill to impress her classmates, yet later she

---

<sup>212</sup> Slater, p.38.

<sup>213</sup> Slater, p.45.

<sup>214</sup> Slater, p.52.

<sup>215</sup> Slater, p.55.

<sup>216</sup> Slater, p.88.

starts to steal time and attention in the school sickroom and various emergency rooms all over the city: *“After school, I would drop in to different ERs, and stage a seizure, and wake up in that wonderful way, wake up in the blizzard of nurses, a cup of cool water held to my lips, oh.”*<sup>217</sup> Nurses and doctors thus replace the parents. They give her the care and feelings of security that her home lacks. In this way, Lauren hides away from the real world that is too hard for her to bear:

*“There was a world out there, but I didn’t have to be part of it, and slowly I saw the privilege of this. It must have been in the sickroom where illness became not a thing I had but a thing through which I could escape. It was a secret door in the back of a Victorian closet, (...) Through the thin walls I might hear the other world, the difficult world where maybe women were cold, (...) where there was the titter of growing girls; I was free from that. I was safe. I saw hot-air balloons and lovely ladies fed me salted limes, and in this place, my place, I stayed small forever.”*<sup>218</sup>

However, as Lauren later undergoes a surgery which dramatically reduces her seizures, she finds herself even more distanced from the world, not knowing how to live in it and confused. She loses her new home – the hospital, and as we have mentioned above, she is no longer under her mother’s consideration either:

*“I was alone in the woods, with the worms and crows.”*<sup>219</sup> *“I was free, free to fall, to smoke, to spit, to kiss; free to dress in black, or in crushed velvet, or in ratty tuxedo tails, it was dizzying.”*

*“When she [her mother] cried, it was for things so utterly separate from me that her tears were personal insults. I told myself I didn’t care. But sometimes I think all the corruption that followed had to do with the fact that there was a space between us, and, when I was thirteen, in an extra rickety world, I needed to fill that space with something, and it would not be her. I told myself I didn’t care, but my dreams were full of women; women lifting me, women treading toward me, while above the moon burned in a beautiful way.”*<sup>220</sup>

Lauren, on the other hand, always wanted to cry for her mother and later for both of them – for the relationship and love they lost and she missed. Nevertheless, she hardly ever allowed herself to feel that sadness and longing. Rather, she felt numb and hollow<sup>221</sup> and searched

---

<sup>217</sup> Slater, p.86.

<sup>218</sup> Slater, p.74.

<sup>219</sup> Slater, p.62.

<sup>220</sup> Slater, p.64, (parenthesis mine).

<sup>221</sup> When discussing Enid Balint’s article *On Being Empty*, Chodorow says that this feeling of

for something or someone that could fill her up, be it other people's love and attention, or their tchotchkes.

Although Lauren got rid of her seizures, she did not lose her auras. This was important to her as in the midst of an especially potent one she discovered her creativity as a writer. Through her ingeniously written words then, she wanted to sustain her first love relationship with an author some thirty years her senior, whom she met at a writer's conference.

*"If I wrote well enough, my auras would grace us, their heat would bind us, and he would so much admire me that through my words alone we would come to love."<sup>222</sup>*

*"When he read my words, he would want to make love to me forever. I was a sorcerer, my spell a mix of clattering consonants, my language a series of links that could close any chasm. Complete."<sup>223</sup>*

However, this passionate attachment went into crumbles when her lover cheated on her with another young talented authoress. Slater's words thus lost their uniqueness: *"(...) my words were not the only words or even the top words, they were just words, words among many. And then I felt my words drop into the chasm, I could almost hear them hitting the rocky bottom of my brain like Coke cans tossed into a gorge."*

Susan Woodring claims that this is where Lauren is finally healed – despite losing the man, she holds onto the words.<sup>224</sup> This certainly rings true even though she does not acknowledge that yet. On the contrary, she continues wondering, what *"would fill the silence, the space in me? What would make me real? I had tried stealing, sickness, the lovely links of language, none of it had worked. I needed something more direct, like life support. Hook me up, please."<sup>225</sup>*

Finally, worn down by the void inside of her, frustrated by the neutrality of college life, and unable to find help at a campus

---

lack of self, or emptiness, happens especially when a person *"is with others who read the social and emotional setting differently but do not recognize this, nor recognize that the person herself is in a different world. This feeling has its origins in the early mother-daughter relationship."* Balint illustrates this with a case example of a false empathy (the mother reacts to her projection of the infant's needs, not to the actual infant's needs). Chodorow: *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p.100-101.

<sup>222</sup> Slater, p.140.

<sup>223</sup> Slater, p.145.

<sup>224</sup> Woodring, Susan: *Quick-Sand Rules and Shapeless Places*, a review of *Lying*, January 5, 2002, [www.amazon.com/gp/cdp/member/reviews/A31CZ50SUXBO9H/3%Fencoding=UTF8](http://www.amazon.com/gp/cdp/member/reviews/A31CZ50SUXBO9H/3%Fencoding=UTF8).

counseling center, she wanders into a church one day and finds herself inadvertently drawn into an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting. In spite of not being an alcoholic she joins the group as they offer her the comfort and support she has been lacking. However, being incapable of *“living in limbo, of never coming down, clean and hard like a hammer on the nail of absolute knowing,”* she tries to concede this last lie of hers, but she is unable to convince her confessors of her truthfulness. *“And so I looked at those AAers who would not hear me. They would not hear me! There they were with their solid, sure faces, (...) a fucking cult they were. (...) Somewhere, a door slammed shut in me. A child screamed, temper tantrum. (...) I felt hate. I ran out of the room.”*<sup>226</sup>

At last, as all her efforts to fill up her hollowness are thwarted, she gives up. But this surrender is active. She takes to the field and *falls*.

*“Out in that field, I heard it happening. The trees cheered, the stars cheered, the monks and nuns and friends and family cheered as I went down, legs hurled out at the hip, I fell, and gave up the ground, and for that split second, spinning in utter space, I was nowhere, I was nothing, my mouth open round, like a zero, like 0, out of which the baby is born, the words spill, the planet pops, the trees grow, everything rising; real.”*<sup>227</sup>

Slater stops seizing and embraces her emptiness. She acquires Will B, because if *“you know Will B, you know your life. You know what my mother never learned. That it is only by entering emptiness and ugliness, not by covering it up with feathers and sprays, that you find a balance so true, no one can take it away.”*<sup>228</sup> In other words, Lauren accepts and conquers the challenge of nothingness, the challenge *“to which we must always return, that radical, far-flung freedom.”*<sup>229</sup> And it is this challenge that she offers to her patients when she becomes a psychiatrist later in her life.

And what about Slater’s mother? She becomes matrimonial consultant and they remain distant. But Lauren is happy since her mother *“found her place in the world, a white white world, an aisle of*

---

<sup>225</sup> Slater, p.156.

<sup>226</sup> Slater, p.214.

<sup>227</sup> Slater, pp.216-217.

<sup>228</sup> Slater, p.53.

<sup>229</sup> Slater, p.198.

*perpetual promise.*” She no longer minds her mother’s stiffness, the fact that she is more comfortable with her clients than with her, between them “*a certain formality.*” “*I was happy she was happy, a burden off my back.*”<sup>230</sup> As Lauren dresses up as a bride, she, for a moment, finally becomes her mother’s girl:

*“And in that mirror we saw who I had not become, the gift I hadn’t given her, so I gave it to her then. We stood for what seemed hours, for what seemed days, and she fussed with my hair, and my father came downstairs. ‘Here comes the bride,’ he said. And we all laughed together in a nice way, a little bit close, a little warmth, an ending of sorts, except this: I was still in costume.”*<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup> Slater, p.189.

<sup>231</sup> Slater, p.191.

### 3.4. AUTHOR AND READER – FILLING THE GAPS

"10. Together we will journey. We are disoriented, and all we ever really want is a hand to hold.

11. I am so happy you are holding me in your hands. I am sitting far away from you, but when you turn the pages, I feel a flutter in me, and wings rise up."

-Lauren Slater<sup>232</sup>

In chapter 1.1., we have introduced Marie Maclean's concept of narrative as performance and we have confirmed that reading is, above all, a process of interaction between the author and the reader, between the narrator and the narratee. (The narratee is often identified with the reader as is the case of *Ellen Foster* and the major part of *Lying*.) We have said that this endeavor can progress as a collaboration or as a combat, or as both at the same time. Looking at our novels from this perspective, it appears that while *Ellen Foster* represents an example of a smooth co-operation between the author and the reader, which is largely due to its narrator's reliability,<sup>233</sup> *Lying* falls into a more complicated category of a contest, whose winner is utterly dependant on achieving the interest and trust of the other. No matter how difficult this struggle might be, it is important that we undertake this journey together, the author together with the reader, supporting – and certainly also doubting – each other (and perhaps even ourselves) on the way.

What makes this journey particularly exciting and intriguing is the *openness* of both texts. This means that the novels encourage readers to actively interpret them, rather than simply accept the texts passively as something with a single meaning, complete and apart from the reader's action. Thanks to this, we can read and understand the novels in many different ways. This brings us back to the idea of a unique interpretation and meaning that each reading produces as it takes place in time and as it is shaped by the reader's background and experience. Even further readings of the same texts by the same reader vary from

---

<sup>232</sup> Slater, p.163. Two of the nineteen points from the chapter 7: *How to Market This Book*.

<sup>233</sup> Alice Hoffman suggests that Ellen Foster (the narrator of the story) is possibly "*the most trustworthy character in recent fiction*." Hoffman, *ibid*. Ellen herself uncompromisingly declares her narrative authority: "*If you let somebody tell you anything else you are a fool because what I have told you is right*." Gibbons, p.85.



the first.<sup>234</sup> (Similarly, our reading and understanding of earlier passages changes as we progress to later ones.) Assuredly, this largely happens owing to the existence of *gaps* (or *blanks*) in the text – gaps that the reader must fill in in order to establish meaning, and that the discussed texts are full of. Let us first have a look at Kaye Gibbons’s story in which gaps are created through the use of a limited point of view, the lack of punctuation in the dialogue, and shifts in the time sequence.

As has been mentioned above (chapter 2.4.1.), Ellen is the narrator of her own story. Consequently, the so-called “big picture” is hidden from our view. Everything we learn about the story and its characters is filtered through Ellen’s eyes. Thus we are forced to piece the story together on our own, bit by bit, rather than having an omniscient, neutral narrator who would serve us the story as a ready-made meal. However, by occasionally allowing Ellen to report on the reactions of others, Gibbons offers us additional clues to the interpretation of the whole. As these reactions are apprehended differently by Ellen and by us as the readers, we happen to know more about the overall situation than our heroine does.

The scene of Ellen’s “*mama’s mama’s*” death serves as a good example. As Ellen has been reproached for lack of response to her mother’s death, she sees her grandmother’s death as an opportunity to atone herself. When people arrive at the house, she wants “*mama’s mama*” to look as nice as possible:

*“Anybody with any decency would honor the dead and fix them up in their own bed. Especially after my experience.*

*You learn by your mistakes.*

*But I had this one fixed pretty as a picture. I did not want a soul to say I had not done my part even down to the decorations.*

*I found her Sunday hat she never wore and tilted it on her head the way a live woman might pop a hat on to ride to town in. Then the best part I will always be proud of was the nice frame I made all around her body. I put all the artificial flowers I could*

---

<sup>234</sup> Maclean would say that this is in many ways parallel to the production of a play. The same group of actors performing the same script night after night will never produce two identical performances.

*find from all those show jars around her end to end so she looked set off like a picture. A still life you might say.*<sup>235</sup>

While we are within Ellen's restricted point of view, her behavior makes perfect sense. We are reading the scene in the same way as she does. Nevertheless, we shift out of this perspective on reading: *"The colored boys that loaded her up got a big kick out of my project but Nadine said I was sick to do such a thing."*<sup>236</sup> Instantly, we realize that this little girl must appear very odd to others. Likewise, when Ellen says that *"there have been more than a plenty days"* when her *"new mama"* held Ellen's hands in hers until her breathing slowed down and she stopped shaking, we comprehend that Ellen is far more traumatized than her narration leads us to believe.<sup>237</sup> These moments permit us to read Ellen as other characters read her. Consequently, our perspective is widened and a better grasp of the story is possible.

Further gaps are opened up by Gibbons's conscious choice to omit punctuation around the dialogue. As has been shown earlier (chapter 2.5.5.), it is often unclear how much of the dialogue is spoken aloud, and how much of it occurs only in Ellen's head. Moreover, there are shifts in who is being addressed, as in the scene following Ellen's grandmother's death:

*"You two go ahead and fight over who did not take care of the other one's mama. You two pass the blame back and forth like butter at your tables and I will stay out of this circle and time of blaming because I am not guilty today. And even when she was so dead I could not help her anymore I made her like a present to Jesus so maybe he would take her. Take this one I got prettied up and mark it down by my name to balance against the one I held back from you before (...)."*<sup>238</sup>

Here, at the beginning of the paragraph, Ellen is clearly (in her thoughts) talking to her two aunts, Betsy and Nadine. Suddenly, however, we realize that she is praying to God. This device forces us to reread passages. Notwithstanding, as we reread, our understanding of the text shifts and grows.<sup>239</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Gibbons, p.91.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Gibbons, p.121.

<sup>238</sup> Gibbons, p.92.

<sup>239</sup> Maclean writes that *"a book has by its nature to be a succession of signs which the audience can influence and incorporate only retrospectively. Feedback in written texts means in essence*

Another method of implementing gaps in the text is Gibbons's use of a chronologically-fragmented time structure.<sup>240</sup> In the opening chapter of the novel, we are catapulted between Ellen's present in her new home with her "new mama" and her past with her real mama who was to die. Consequently, we discover that it will be our task to organize the details into a coherent story of Ellen's journey from past to present. Only our own active participation will enable us to understand this route.

Besides leaving gaps in the text, Gibbons profusely employs indefinite personal pronoun "you" and rhetorical questions<sup>241</sup> in order to draw the reader into the story. This "you" talks about people in general and includes the speaker and hearer. That is, it involves the narrator and narratee – Ellen and us. For example, when Ellen's father and his drinking mates party at his house and start to discuss their daughters and sex, Ellen hides in the closet and says:

*"What else do you do when your house is run over by colored men drinking whiskey and singing and your daddy is worse than them all put together? You pray to God they forget about you and the sweet young things that are soff when you mashum and how good one feels when she is pressed up by you. You get out before one can wake up from being passed out on your floor. You get out before they start to dream about the honey pie and the sugar plums. (...) Oh you just have to wonder what the world has come to."<sup>242</sup>*

Here, as in many other examples that could be quoted, the "you" means not only that 'one' has to pray and wonder but also that Ellen is searching for a formula on how to deal with the situation – and, in this way, she is prodding the readers to give it a thought. However, as she is a very self-sufficient girl, she immediately comes up with an answer that can also serve us as an advice. Often, this "you" seems very straightforward as if Ellen was speaking to the reader directly: *"And what else do you take when you leave a place you never will come back to not even if you forget something very precious to you? You will just*

---

rereading." Maclean, p.9, (emphasis hers).

<sup>240</sup> This structure has been discussed in more detail in chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>241</sup> The most touching one we read is: *"Have you ever felt like you could cry because you know you just heard the most important thing anybody in the world could have spoke at that second?"* Gibbons, p.99. This and similar rhetorical questions set us off pondering.

<sup>242</sup> Gibbons, pp.37-38.

*have to live without it.*<sup>243</sup> Or better: *“But you have to be careful with dreaming like that especially about people you do not know good.”*<sup>244</sup>

However, there are more factual instances of Ellen speaking directly toward the reader, as when she starts to describe to us her room at “*new mama’s*” house: *“Look around my room. It is so nice.”* Or when her father leaves the house after his wife’s overdosing on pills: *“And you know and I know he’s gone to get himself something to drink.”*<sup>245</sup>

Similarly, when Ellen tells us of her aunt’s occupation as a propagator of food slicers “*in your home,*” her insistence on “*you*” and “*your living room*” easily brings Nadine to our real houses. These moments therefore serve as triggers of our imagination same as they bring us closer to the heroine. We become increasingly connected with her.<sup>246</sup> As she asks for and gives advice (be it on how to shop or survive trauma), we feel more and more as her friends, and – as she shares her secret thoughts with us – even as her conspirators.

The novel virtually overflows with *yous* but many of these relate to Ellen herself (when she is talked to) or other characters she addresses. Due to omission of punctuation in the dialogue (and Ellen’s stream of consciousness), they are often tricky to figure out. However, it is the above mentioned active participation/co-operation of the reader that Gibbons is after, the same as her character’s authenticity and plausibility. *“My idea of an ideal reader is someone who has the ability to take a kernel of information about a character and extrapolate and build and make that character grow within her own imagination. And I don’t want people who have read my work to get my book, go out on the deck, put up their feet and say, ‘Okay, Kaye Gibbons, do it.’”*<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> Gibbons, p.40.

<sup>244</sup> Gibbons, p.105.

<sup>245</sup> Gibbons, p.5.

<sup>246</sup> Comments like e.g., *“If you are like me you will put it [doing homework] off until the last minute,”* certainly make it easy for children and teenagers to relate to her. Gibbons, p.59.

<sup>247</sup> Kaye Gibbons in Jordan, p.81.

### 3.5. FACT, FICTION OR FACTION?

*"Debates about whether any writing is "true" and the relationship between literature and life have been current since Plato and Aristotle battled this out in The Republic and Poetics but, even in these days of postmodernist relativity, such discussion becomes most inflamed when talking about the so-called 'literature of fact', and especially regarding biography and autobiography, where writing the 'true' story of a life is still the popular definition of these literary forms."*

- Donna Lee Briar<sup>248</sup>

*"After all, a lot, or at least some, or at least a few, of the literal facts are accurate. Second of all, even those things that are not literally true about me are metaphorically true about me, and that's an important point."*

- Lauren Slater<sup>249</sup>

Lauren Slater sets up her major gaps by constant coquetry with truth and lie, thus bringing us not only to the land of not-knowing, but of never-knowing. As the title, *Lying*, and subtitle, *A Metaphorical Memoir*, suggest, many layers of doubt predetermine everything that Slater writes, and she proves a very skillful manipulator. She incorporates *fiction* into her *memoir*, and no matter how hard we try, we can never be completely sure which parts of her story are true and which are fabricated. This results in a harder struggle to attain narrative authority on her part, but we are the ones who suffer from the lack of it. As Donna Lee Brian reports, Picasso once quarreled with Gertrude Stein because, according to him, she "lied" in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). In her text, Stein rearranged the seating plan at a dinner, which infuriated Picasso.<sup>250</sup> We can only wonder how he would handle Slater's *Lying*, in which she defines the outer limits of lifewriting by repeatedly crossing its boundaries.

We have mentioned that Slater warns us in the beginning – the phrase "*I exaggerate.*" represents the whole content of the first chapter. Soon after, despite that we are supposedly reading a memoir about epilepsy, Slater reports: "*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*

---

<sup>248</sup> Briar, Donna Lee: *Being Honest about Lying: Defining the Limits of Auto/biographical writing*, April 2002, Vol.6, No.1, <http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/april02/briar.htm>.

<sup>249</sup> Slater, p.162.

*glittering place I had in my mother's heart.*<sup>251</sup> In correspondence with Richard Ingram, we can say that Slater's "epilepsy" could be real or imaginary. It could be distinct from a fraught relationship with her mother, or it could be a way of understanding and negotiating that relationship. It could also be desired so strongly that longing breaks down any distinction between "real" and "imaginary". Or it could stem from the same need to tell tall tales that she observed so often in her mother.<sup>252</sup> The same goes for Slater's other illnesses. Not much later, we get to "a little hoary truth in this tricky tale. The summer I was thirteen I developed Munchausen's, on top of my epilepsy, or—and you must consider this, I ask you please to consider this—perhaps Munchausen's is all I ever had. Perhaps I was, and still am, a pretender, a person who creates illnesses because she needs time, attention, touch, because she knows no other way of telling her life's tale."<sup>253</sup>

The epilepsy, the Munchausen's syndrome, Lauren's proclivity for lying and kleptomania, "these are the smoke and mirrors of the story, and Slater walks a fine line to keep the reader detached from the facts."<sup>254</sup> Initially, readers try to ascertain what is real and what is invention, some even intend to contact Slater in order to ask her for clarification. Brian says that Slater's consistent statements about her propensity to lie soon drew her away from any real engagement with the story or the author. "I found myself quickly moving from asking, 'Does Slater really have epilepsy? And if she does, how badly? Or does she instead have Munchausen's, or the borderline personality, bipolar disorders, and autism she claims?' to 'Why am I continuing to read this?'"<sup>255</sup> Likewise, Jan Zita Grover comments: "How little, Slater seems to ask, can I give you besides language and still keep you loyal to me, still reading?"<sup>256</sup> Indeed, many readers become frustrated<sup>257</sup> early in the

---

<sup>250</sup> Brian, *ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Slater, pp.5-6.

<sup>252</sup> Ingram, *ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> Slater, p.88.

<sup>254</sup> Nash, Amanda: *We All Fall Down*, In: *Women's Review of Books*, October 2000, v.18, p.14.

<sup>255</sup> Brian, *ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> Grover, Jan Zita: *Unreliable Narrator*, In: *Women's Review of Books*, July 2002, v.19, p.43.

<sup>257</sup> In this respect, Slater is remindful of Thomas Pynchon: "There is a sense in Pynchon in which the totalizing and knowledge-greedy egos of his readers are ultimately frustrated with his works." His work might be described as "an intentional effort to upset his readers into new ways of reading." Roraback, Erik: *Contemporary American Literature II*, In: Procházka a kol., p.305-306.

book and want to throw the text away. Amanda Nash, on the other hand, was seduced by the uncertainty: *"The more I read, the more I began to enjoy the not-knowingness. There is a giddy freedom, a buoyancy, to letting go of what is real in order to get a glimpse of the subject's essence. We believe the story because it is believable, not because we know it to be true."*<sup>258</sup>

Nevertheless, not everybody is capable of accepting this freedom. Most readers find the uncertainty extremely upsetting. Hence, they keep trying to separate fact from fiction, truth from lie, while simultaneously attempting to figure out whether they are dealing with a memoir or a novel.<sup>259</sup> These issues are, naturally, interrelated, yet their solution is irrelevant in respect to the suffering Slater seeks to convey. The desired approach to these inquiries is set out in the *Introduction to Lying*. Here, the aforementioned Hayward Krieger argues that through her *"unsettling and exciting (...) insistence on not revealing to us which aspects of her disease are factual, which symbolic, which real, which fantastical,"* Slater encourages us *"to enter with her a new kind of Heideggerian truth, the truth of the liminal, the not-knowing, the truth of confusion, which, if we can only learn to tolerate, yields us greater wisdom in the long run than packaged and parceled facts."*<sup>260</sup>

It is precisely in this truth where the majority of Slater's suffering abides. But can we learn to tolerate it? We can. We must.

At the outset of her memoir, Slater tells us: *"I don't know where this is my mother or where this is my illness, or whether, like her, I am just*

---

<sup>258</sup> Nash, *ibid.* Some critics only consider *believable* those sections of the book where Slater calls attention to the fact that she cannot remember major details. E.g., when she recounts her beginnings as a thief she says: *"Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I really started to steal a few days after that, or a few weeks before. Maybe it's just certain narrative demands, a need for neatness compelling me to say that was the night or and this led surely to this (...)"* Slater, p.69, (emphasis hers).

<sup>259</sup> In the chapter *How to Market This Book* Slater writes: *"This is a difficult book, I know. There was or was not a cherry tree. The seizures are real or something else. I am an epileptic or I have Munchausen's. For marketing purposes, we have to decide [whether it is a book of fiction or fact] (...) There's no bookstore term for something in between, gray matter. If you called it faction you would confuse the bookstore people. You would lose a lot of money."* Slater, pp.159-160, (brackets mine).

<sup>260</sup> Slater, pp.ix-x. *"I was on the telephone to confirm my suspicion that there is no such person as Hayward Krieger before I'd even begun the first chapter,"* writes reviewer Rebecca Mead in the New York Times. The number of reviewers who have felt compelled to investigate whether this or that professor or doctor from *Lying* is a fictional character is indicative of how

*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.*<sup>261</sup> As has been remarked,<sup>262</sup> different metaphors are employed throughout the book to depict the past for which Slater could not find immediate words, or so she asserts. Towards the end of the book, Slater declares:

*“Alcoholism can stand in for epilepsy, the same way epilepsy can stand in for depression, for disintegration, for self-hatred, for the unspeakable dirt between a mother and a daughter; sometimes you just don’t know how to say the pain directly – I do not know how to say the pain directly, I never have – and I often tell myself it really doesn’t matter, because either way, any way, the brain shivers and craves, cracked open.”*<sup>263</sup>

We might or might not trust her claims about the use of metaphors, yet it remains true that pain is still pain. What matters is the sharing of it, not the directness of that sharing. Based on our life experience, many of us can certainly assert that sometimes pain cannot be expressed directly. When discussing *Hiroshima mon amour* in her book, Caruth suggests that the interest of the movie lies particularly in how it explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of its telling. *“In his refusal to make a documentary on Hiroshima, Resnais paradoxically implies that it is direct archival footage that cannot maintain the very specificity of the event.”* And it appears that it is through the fictional story, not *about* Hiroshima but taking place at its sight, that Resnais and Duras believe such historical specificity is conveyed.<sup>264</sup> However, Slater continues in the next paragraph: *“And yet there is always the desire to find the words that refer directly to reality, fact and truth together.”*<sup>265</sup>

Let us explore Slater’s notions of fact and truth though. In the chapter called *How to Market This Book* Slater states: *“Sometimes I look at my foot and I can’t believe it belongs to me. (...) If you asked me who I was at that moment, I would tell you many things, including the fact that I am*

---

unsettling Slater's mélange of truths and lies can be. Ingram, *ibid.*, (full data missing).

<sup>261</sup> Slater, p.6.

<sup>262</sup> In chapter 2.5.4. of this thesis.

<sup>263</sup> Slater, pp.203-204.

<sup>264</sup> Caruth, p.27.

<sup>265</sup> Slater, pp.203-204.



*footless. Why is what we feel less true than what is?*<sup>266</sup> Similarly, on various occasions, Slater tells us of snow falling and fingers freezing, in spite of the season being summer and flowers being in bloom. She calls this her emotional memory as opposed to factual memory. In the *Afterword*, she describes one of the points of postmodernism – the one that has been “*driven*” into her heart:

*“What matters in knowing and telling yourself is not the historical truth, which fades as our neurons decay and stutter, but the narrative truth, which is delightfully bendable and politically powerful.” “Lying,” she goes on, “is a book of narrative truth, a book in which I am more interested in using invention to get to the heart of things than I am in documenting actual life occurrences.”*<sup>267</sup>

Facts do not matter much. She admits disregarding them often. Yet many readers struggle with such an attitude towards facts in a book of creative non-fiction as it is the responsibility of an author to be factual that is expected there. Slater thus repeatedly shatters the contract we, the readers, have settled with her. However, she does that on purpose.

Does *Lying* then violate the rules of memoir? We know that dialogue and details are recreated without meticulous veracity in most memoirs, although in most cases this is not explicitly admitted. In respect to the readers who require complete and accurate disclosure, it could be said that *“Lying is even more honest than other memoirs, because the author announces that she has taken liberties.”*<sup>268</sup> *“Is it possible to narrate an honest nonfiction story if you are a slippery sort?”* Slater asks the reader, and continues: *“I, for one, am a slippery sort, but I believe I’m also an honest sort because I admit my slipperiness.”* According to Slater, to come clean in this memoir would be dishonest as it would go against her nature. She claims that the purpose of any good non-fiction memoirist is to capture *“the essence”* of the narrator. A memoirist’s guiding principles are authenticity and sincerity. *“I truly believe that if I came completely clean I would be telling the biggest lie of all, and at*

---

<sup>266</sup> Slater, p.162.

<sup>267</sup> Slater, p.220.

<sup>268</sup> Nash, *ibid.*

*heart I am not a liar, I am passionately dedicated to the truth, which, by the way, is not necessarily the same thing as fact, so loosen up!*<sup>269</sup>

Slater's take on memoir perfectly serves her intentions. Although her readers, for the most part, are unable to distinguish between her reality and her fantasy, at least they know what they are in for when they pick up the book. However, an ordinary reader cannot help approaching the memoir as any other (regular) book and thus she disregards Slater's warning. Slater's intentions, besides sharing her suffering etc., are to question conventions and the establishment as to why *"the essential story should at least aim for accuracy"*<sup>270</sup> when one embarks on the relatively uncharted territory of creative nonfiction. Why could she not use metaphor to try to explain her mental state? Crystal Fodrey agrees with Slater that *"it does not matter if her readers believe her stories as long as they understand the metaphor, the idea that these stories represent the emotions of her youth."* However, Fodrey continues affirming that such artistic liberty is not an option for most serious memoirists (*"who write fact, not fiction"*), nor should it be. *"Slater lied to prove a point—that she could market a partially fictional book as nonfiction because she felt as though her metaphors expressed the real truth better than factual information could."*<sup>271</sup>

Let us sum up, for what purpose is the story told? If the purpose of this memoir was to serve history, *Lying* would certainly fall short. However, if this memoir serves any of a variety of other purposes for which a reader reads, then different standards apply. *"This book provokes valuable questions about the psychological mechanisms we employ to get our emotional needs satisfied, and about detaching ourselves from illness, whether psychological or physical or some combination of the two."*<sup>272</sup> In *Lying*, Slater reveals *"subtle truths about how people choose somatic as well as intellectual methods for 'telling' the stories of their own lives; and she calls into serious question how*

---

<sup>269</sup> Slater, p.160.

<sup>270</sup> Slater, p.60.

<sup>271</sup> Fodrey, Crystal: *The Necessity of Truth in Creative Nonfiction*, In: *Thoreau's Rooster*, Spring 2004, vol.3, [http://www.assumption.edu/users/land/v3essays/crystal\\_fodrey.html](http://www.assumption.edu/users/land/v3essays/crystal_fodrey.html).

<sup>272</sup> Nash, *ibid*.

*lying, when used as metaphor, can be a method of communicating the truth.*<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, as Slater might add, the book provides comfort and reassurance by providing company - company in the loneliest place: the reader's psyche. "Come with me, reader," Slater begs us, "I am toying with you, yes, but for a real reason. I am asking you to enter the confusion with me, to give up the ground with me, because sometimes that frightening floaty place is really the truest of all."<sup>274</sup>

Grover says that "Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir drives the reader deeper into its narrator's mind than I as a reader want to go."<sup>275</sup>

Notwithstanding, this is where Slater needs us to enter in order that we fully understand her narrative of suffering. It is precisely by skillfully toying with us through her metanarrative, and by not letting us surrender that she gets us there. "It is in the event of this incomprehension and in our departure from sense and understanding that our own witnessing may indeed begin to take place."<sup>276</sup> In this sense, accepting the confusion, the not-knowing, and letting go, enables us not only to witness Slater's distress, but directly experience it on ourselves. We feel we have been combating with her; yet unaware, we have cooperated. What is more, through our reading and pondering of her words, we gave her the attention and care that she has been seeking.

"Kierkegaard says, 'The greatest lie of all is the feeling of firmness beneath our feet. We are at our most honest when we are lost.' Enter that lostness with me. Live in the place I am, where the view is murky, where the connecting bridges and orienting maps have been surgically stripped away."

"Together we will journey. We are disoriented, and all we ever really want is a hand to hold."<sup>277</sup>

---

<sup>273</sup> Goldsmith, Francisca: Slater, Lauren: *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, In: *Kliatt*, May 2002, vol.36, No.3, p.34.

<sup>274</sup> Slater, p.163.

<sup>275</sup> Grover, *ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> Caruth, p.56.

<sup>277</sup> Slater, p.163.

## 4. CONCLUSION

*"I also believe we all have different ways of putting order to what goes on around us. Other people exercise to order their days. I use language to order my past. I feel like if I can get all of that in order, then I have a network for the future and everything will be okay."*

*- Kaye Gibbons<sup>278</sup>*

*"Therefore, despite the huge proliferation of authoritative illness memoirs in recent years, memoirs that talk about people's personal experiences with Tourette's and postpartum depression and manic depression, memoirs that are often rooted in the latest scientific 'evidence,' something is amiss. For me, the authority is illusory, the etiologies constructed. When all is said and done, there is only one kind of illness memoir I can see to write, and that's a slippery, playful, impish, exasperating, text, shaped, if it could be, like a question mark."*

*- Lauren Slater<sup>279</sup>*

Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster* and Lauren Slater's *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* represent similar yet different examples of postmodern maturation novels. Their heroines successfully cope with suffering while simultaneously overcoming the readers as narratees. The writers' means of expressing their heroines' pain vary, the same as the arms they have chosen in order to win the battle for narrative authority (which is crucial in order that the texts are readable, thus interpretable).<sup>280</sup>

Looking at the novels as individual performances in which the text and the reader perform the act of telling, we can conclude that neither of them lacks movement, energy or effect. While Gibbons easily wins us through the portrayal of her narrator (reliable, besides other characteristics), the vividness and vernacular authenticity of her prose and the ways she engages us in her discourse;<sup>281</sup> Slater at first struggles with us in what we perceive as a disconcerting, frustrating and most probably vain attempt at trusting her unreliable narrator, yet

---

<sup>278</sup> Powell, p.116.

<sup>279</sup> Slater, p.221.

<sup>280</sup> For another humorous account of childhood suffering see the acclaimed Frank McCourt's misery memoir called *Angela's Ashes*. For an endeavor somehow similar to Slater's, see James Frey's largely fake memoir of drug addiction called *'a million little pieces.'*

<sup>281</sup> That is, primarily, through the application of *gaps* in her *open* text. See chapter 3.4.

sooner or later we surrender and are enlightened by the effect of her toying with us.<sup>282</sup>

Slater repeatedly breaks the contract<sup>283</sup> with the reader, thus spoiling our expectations and desires. Hence, the iterative recruitment of our interest is, naturally, more arduous. However, the result is more intense. Slater uncompromisingly invades our territory and forces us to cede it.<sup>284</sup> In this way, she constructs her own readers. Ultimately, Slater says that truth does not lie in fact, but in what could be called Keat's negative capability, meaning a willingness to dwell in undefined space where nothing is really solid.<sup>285</sup> By making us enter into this slippery place, she enables us to comprehend her fully. In this way, we not only "get into" her book, but also into her head. We experience the workings of her painful uncertainty on our bodies/minds. Her frustrations and trauma become ours and vice-versa. We can hardly imagine a more direct way of achieving this. Had we not joined her in this land of not-knowing, had we read the book as "*just one more true account of yet another disease*,"<sup>286</sup> Slater would have felt that she had failed in her endeavor. And rightly so, as her disease serves primarily as metaphor, and might have never existed. As Maclean says, "*performance is not subjected to the criterion of truth or falsehood, but judged on success or failure. Its standards are those of desire or lack rather than of fact.*"<sup>287</sup>

If Slater appears to be more intense and prosperous (in respect to her intentions) in the interaction with the reader, it is Gibbons whom we perceive this way when discussing "*the textual itinerary*" of recurring

---

<sup>282</sup> Certainly, it is not her metanarrative that makes Slater's text vulnerable. However, her excessive and repetitive lyricism occasionally threatens it, same as Fiske's 'noise' in the form of our ignorance, incompetence, or, most likely, unwillingness to co-operate (this goes for Gibbons as well; for the explanation of 'noise' see chapter 1.2.).

<sup>283</sup> More precisely, Slater breaks what *we* consider "the contract" before we grasp *her* idea of the contract which differs considerably from our customary anticipations due to her attempts to convey a knotty state of mind and soul as well as to question conventions.

<sup>284</sup> Our clash with the author of *Lying* confirms Maclean's assertion that "*the narrative exchange too [like sexual exchange] may be motivated by anything from curiosity to passion, may produce anything from revulsion to delight, may run the gamut of failure from fiasco to rape.*" Maclean, p.35, (brackets mine).

<sup>285</sup> Woodring, *ibid.*

<sup>286</sup> Slater, p.162.

<sup>287</sup> Maclean, p.xi.

words and figures that, according to Caruth,<sup>288</sup> bear witness to some (forgotten) wound, through which the voice of trauma is released. The key figures we have uncovered and highlighted in Gibbons's text are those of "*mama*" and "*food*." These figures, or words, resonate throughout the novel with such a frequency and importunity that they betray the depth of Ellen's trauma in spite of her light-hearted and impish narration. Apparently, Ellen is only partially aware of this pain which, together with her nature, allows her to briskly move on. Slater, on the other hand, proves to be more aware of her sundry pains,<sup>289</sup> notwithstanding her inability to untie their knot, leads her into a bewilderment that is even less bearable. This confusion is reflected in the variety of the key recurring figures as well: be it "*falling*," "*seizing*," "*lying*," "*stealing*," "*spasm*," "*split*," "*epilepsy*," or *dreams of "women lifting her"*, "*houses holding her*", "*feelings of emptiness*" or "*holes*," and be these used as metaphors or literally, they all reveal the shaky ground beneath Lauren's feet and her need of – and desire for – attention and approval; and ultimately, love.

However, we can observe these reiterative images, or words, from a different perspective. Besides viewing them as representations of the cries of a wounded psyche that turns to us in the attempt to disclose some otherwise unavailable truth and its incessant impact on a life, we can perceive them as the cries of another, that is, through the prism of Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's narrative of the dream of the burning child. From this view, the figures represent an urgent plea to be heard, to be listened to. In this way, we can see how one's trauma might be tied to that of another, and how trauma, consequently, can lead to encounter with another, through the very possibility of and willingness to observe/listen to another's wound. In this light, we can interpret Gibbons's and Slater's recurrent figures as addresses directed at the reader, that is, acute pleas that she listens/reads and hears/understands.<sup>290</sup> As Caruth asserts, although these addresses

---

<sup>288</sup> See chapter 1.3. for this and following references to Cathy Caruth in this chapter.

<sup>289</sup> Undoubtedly, this is to a great deal owing to the vantage point from which Slater looks at her own adolescence, that is, that of a woman of 40.

<sup>290</sup> It should be reminded that both authors do this also through other means, e.g., rhetorical

might be - and remain - enigmatic, they still demand a listening and a response. Here lies one of the most important aspects of narratives of suffering - they command us 'to awaken to the child's burning' and respond to it. Caruth would conclude that literature thus opens a window on traumatic experience as it teaches readers to listen to what can be told only in indirect and surprising ways.

The significance of author-reader relationship is further underscored by our analysis of dysfunctional or even (almost) missing mother-daughter relationships in our novels. While we can hardly judge the (most formative) early mother-daughter relationships of our heroines as the narrators provide us with little data in this respect; we can ascertain that the continued importance (emphasized by Chodorow)<sup>291</sup> of these relationships in the later years of the girl's life is not adequately addressed, let alone gratified. To be more accurate, major parts of both novels lack functional mother-daughter relationships as the mothers are either physically absent (living separately or dead) or emotionally absent (unable to bestow love and care on their daughters).<sup>292</sup> As girls have generally more flexible ego boundaries than boys and, consequently, they need to define themselves more in relation to other people and the world, the situation on our heroines' home front leads to grave feelings of lack and/or hollowness. In the case of Slater it even results in self-definition problems. (Slater's case seems very complex as it probably involves patterns of fusion, narcissistic extension, projection, as well as denial of separateness. Further exploration of this issue by a scholar with professional background in psychology would certainly be interesting and fruitful.)

Just a note on the adolescent transition of our heroines: During this period, the mother-daughter relationships are characterized by mutual ambivalence and dependence which results in anxiety (mutual or stronger on the part of the daughter), and attempts to break away, both of which are exemplified by Lauren in *Lying*. Separation is both desired

---

questions.

<sup>291</sup> See chapter 3.1. for this and following theoretical claims and references.

<sup>292</sup> What is more, the father-daughter relationships are similarly dysfunctional or missing.

and dreaded. However, the coldness with which Lauren's mother approaches her daughter only further hinders the necessary loosening of the bond between them. What is more, Lauren is thus predisposed to a perpetual search for her mother's substitute. Yet her confusion of boundaries (where is it me, where is it my mother?), and subsequent mistaking of her mother's wishes for her own, further complicate the issue. As regards Ellen, since we only 'spend' one year with her, and that is at the very beginning of her puberty, we cannot accurately compare her experience with that of Lauren. Nevertheless, by the memories of her deceased mother and from the treatment she receives from her "*new mama*," we can presume that her transition to adolescence will be smooth.<sup>293</sup>

To sum up, Lauren certainly does not receive "*satisfactory mothering*," in fact she hardly catches a glimpse of it (in an AA group). Ellen, on the other hand, does reach this much desired state; however, she first has to strive for it throughout the novel, which is a long and wearing journey. That is another reason why she needs our company. They both do.

In the previous chapters, we have illustrated the manifold formal means through which the authors achieve the expression of their (heroines') traumas. We have seen that in order for these formal means to work, we must co-operate with the author/narrator. Had we refused to engage in this interaction, there would be no successful sharing of any narrative of suffering. In addition, we have explored how the writers convey their (heroines') pain through the portrayal of their chief relationships, that is, with their mothers or their substitutes. The shortcomings of these relationships further stressed the importance of collaborative readers who are willing to bear witness to another person's trauma.

We have affirmed that through our co-operation with the narrator we manage to "get into" the book and, what is more, we get inside our

---

<sup>293</sup> The fact that Ellen chooses to use the word "*mama*" (as opposed to mother) both for her biological and foster mother, the same as for the idea of having a mother in general, seems to reflect her positive experience and attitude towards maternal care.



heroines' minds. To say it differently, a literary work of art is a reality on its own that we – the readers – can, or rather must enter, in order that we become part of this literary 'reality,' and accordingly, this work of art becomes our reality. It is assenting to the (sufferer's) dialog/discourse that can enable us the fullest understanding of the work (narrative of suffering) possible.

As regards the authors of our novels, we could say that they have decided to come to terms with their childhood traumas through the means of language. By writing their books, they have entered into a dialog/discourse with themselves, in other words, a dialog/discourse with language as such (as the subject/"I" is given and formed by language), and most importantly, they have entered into dialog/discourse with the reader. By entering into the latter, they have embarked on a search for understanding among others; put differently, they have widened their 'therapeutic circle.' In all these ways, they have confirmed suffering as a relational concept. Without relating there would be just a trauma without the opportunity of grasping it and relieving of it and, consequently, understanding it and coming to terms with it. It is by sharing the suffering that the process of ordering, coping and healing can be started. By turning pain into prose, pain is turned into purpose. Or as Elaine Scarry says, language is "*a vehicle through which the pain could be lifted out into the world and eliminated.*"<sup>294</sup>

In our thesis, we have explored the given novels specifically from the perspective of trauma theory and narratology. Other disciplines were left in the background or solely dealt with in passing touches. As the novels are products of young American women writers, and as they deal with mother-daughter relationships, further investigating the gender perspective would certainly be of interest. As the novels deal with miscellaneous types of suffering and trauma (especially physical and mental child abuse), and manifold ways of coping with it, both the perspective of psychology and ethics could be further explored. Finally, as we deal with trauma/suffering and its resistance to language, we

suggest that the examination of the novels (particularly that of Slater) through different language theories would be intriguing.

---

<sup>294</sup> Scarry, p.54.

## 5. RESUMÉ

Jak Kaye Gibbons, tak Lauren Slater jsou pro českého čtenáře zcela neznámými spisovatelkami. Jedním z cílů této diplomové práce je proto přiblížit tyto mladé americké autorky českému prostředí.

Kaye Gibbons pochází ze Severní Karolíny a vzhledem k tématům, jimž se ve své próze věnuje, a stylu, jímž píše, se řadí do proudu jižanské literatury po boku Williama Faulknera, Flannery O'Connor a dalších. Již její debut, kterým se v této práci zabýváme, nazvaný dle hlavní hrdinky *Ellen Foster* (1987), sklídl nečekaný úspěch a mnoho prestižních ocenění. Od té doby napsala autorka dalších šest úspěšných románů a svůj vlastní životopis. Charakteristické jsou její hrdinky – vždy silné soběstačné ženy z jižanského venkova.

Lauren Slater pochází z Massachusetts. Ačkoli je především psycholožkou, píše eseje a napsala již šest knih, z toho čtyři autobiografie. Zde se budeme věnovat její třetí autobiografii *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* (2000), která pojednává o autorčině dětství a dospívání. Ve svých dalších autobiografiích zachytila autorka své těhotenství, život s Prozacem (antidepresivum) či svou terapeutickou praxi. Kromě psaní se Slater věnuje řízení kliniky duševního zdraví a vyučování kreativního psaní.

Diplomová práce *No Pain, No Gain* je studií pojednávající o způsobech, kterými lze diskursivně uchopit lidské utrpení, respektive trauma, a vyrovnat se s nimi. Východiskem je (mezi jinými) teze, že překonání psychického traumatu je možné prostřednictvím relační (relational) jazykové komunikace. Můžeme-li se o svou bolest podělit, nastupujeme tak cestu porozumění a vyrovnávání se se svým utrpením. Je-li člověku tato možnost upřena, může se ocitnout ve slepé uličce nepřekonatelného traumatu.

Analýza vlastních uměleckých děl je rozdělena do dvou kapitol, z nichž v první se zabýváme formou literárních děl, v druhé potom nejdůležitějšími vztahy v nich zobrazenými, stejně tak jako v daném

kontextu neméně důležitým vztahem čtenáře a vypravěče, respektive autora. Vlastní analýze předchází úvod a teoretická část práce.

V teoretické části vycházíme za prvé z literární teorie, konkrétně z naratologie; za druhé potom z psychoanalytické teorie, zejména teorie traumatu. Jako sekundární literatura k teorii vyprávění nám nejlépe posloužila Marie Maclean: *Narrative as Performance* se svým důrazem na vzájemné působení (interakci) jednotlivých aktérů v procesu vyprávění/čtení. Ideálním sekundárním pramenem k teorii traumatu ve vztahu k vyprávění je Cathy Caruth: *Unclaimed Experience*. Podle Caruth si texty, které pojednávají o traumatu, vyžadují nový způsob čtení, neboť jen to nám umožňuje objevit „zapomenuté rány“ (forgotten wounds), skrze něž k nám trauma promlouvá. Toto čtení znamená bedlivé sledování „textového itineráře“ (textual itinerary), tj. opakujících se slov a figur. Ona slova a figury ovšem neznázorňují jen dané rány, nýbrž často také představují jakýsi druhý hlas, jenž prosí o naslouchání, vyslyšení (tj. v duchu Lacanovy reinterpretace Freudova příběhu o hořícím dítěti).

Jak již bylo řečeno, v první části literárního rozboru se zabýváme formální stránkou obou děl, tzn. postupně rozebíráme jejich strukturu, narativní techniky, styl, jeho jednotlivé součásti a další.

Díla *Ellen Foster* a *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* jsou postmoderními příklady vývojového románu (též nazýván didaktický či pedagogický román, popř. německy Bildungsroman). Zatímco *Ellen Foster* je autobiografickou novelou, *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir* byl vydán jako kreativní literatura faktu. Žánrové zařazení této autobiografie je však přinejmenším problematické. Už sám název (česky *Lhaní: metaforický memoár*)<sup>295</sup> napovídá, že autorce nepůjde jen o převyprávění určitého úseku svého života, nýbrž o napadení tradičních konvencí týkajících se (kreativní) literatury faktu a polemiku o tom, co je to fakt a fikce, pravda a lež. Zatímco *Ellen Foster* je vyprávěna poměrně přímočarým stylem, tj. ich-formou a metodou střídání časových rovin

---

<sup>295</sup> Anglické slovo „*memoir*“ znamená v češtině jak (auto)biografie, tak memoáry/paměti/vzpomínky/zápisky. Svou povahou je kniha Lauren Slater autobiografií, nicméně v překladu samotného názvu si dovoluji preferovat „memoár,“ ačkoli toto slovo ve spisovné češtině neexistuje. Český jazyk disponuje pouze plurálem „memoáry.“

(time-shift narrative), *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, v souladu se svým názvem, míchá literární žánry i styly a mění vypravěče i publikum. Vedle několika kapitol, jež bez komplikací popisují příhody ze života Lauren, se tak objevují články z vědeckých časopisů, lékařské zprávy, dopisy nakladateli i autorce, dokonce i poezie. Memoár nepostrádá ani úvod a doslov a první kapitola neříká nic víc, ani nic míň, než výmluvné: „Přeháním.“ (I exaggerate).<sup>296</sup>

Podstatnou část formálního rozboru věnujeme stylu autorek, jelikož právě tímto pečlivým čtením (close reading) objevujeme ony zapomenuté rány (forgotten wounds), čili prosby o vyslyšení/naslouchání (a plea of an other). Analýza Ellen Foster odkrývá jako klíčová slova „mamka“ (mama) a „jídlo“ (food) a zřetelně tak artikuluje Ellenin stesk a touhu po matce, stejně tak jako snahu tento „hlad“ utišit, doslova „nakrmit se“ (nurture).<sup>297</sup> Množství i rozmanitost slov a figur, které vyvstávají z rozboru autobiografie Lauren Slater,<sup>298</sup> poukazuje na rozličnost a složitost jejího trápení. Zobrazuje současně i psychologické mechanismy, jichž autorka/hrdinka využívá k získání pozornosti a lásky, ke schválení sebe sama jako člověka (approval), k dosažení toho, co jí vlastní matka odepřela a co vedlo k jejímu psychickému strádání (pocitům prázdnoty a zmatení).

V druhé části analýzy se zabýváme klíčovými vztahy hlavních hrdinek a vztahem čtenáře a autora. Jak pro Ellen, tak pro Lauren je nejdůležitější vztah s matkou a lze říci, že tento vztah či jeho nedostatky dále určují chod hrdinčiných životů. Matka Ellen spáchá hned zpočátku novely sebevraždu a Ellen je tak nucena hledat její náhradu. Najde ji až v náruči pěstounské matky poté, co je psychicky, ale i fyzicky týrána nesčetynými příbuznými, a dokonce i sexuálně obtěžována svým otcem. Matka Lauren je příliš zahleděna do sebe a zklamána životem, proto svou dceru neobdařuje láskou a péčí, jež dítě v tomto věku přirozeně

---

<sup>296</sup> Slater, p.3.

<sup>297</sup> Anglické sloveso „nurture“ je synonymem slovesa „feed.“ Porovnejme (relevantní) české významy: „feed“ – (na)krmit, dát najíst, živit (se), ale i žrát, požírat, sát. Oproti tomu „nurture“ – pečovat, živit, starat (se), vychov(áv)at. Lingua Lexicon 2002.

<sup>298</sup> „Padání“ (falling), „lapání/chopení se“ (seizing), „lhaní“ (lying), „kradení“ (stealing), „záchvat/křeč“ (spasm), „rozpolcení/rozpor/trhlina“ (split), „epilepsie“ (epilepsy), dále pak sny o „ženách“ (women), „domech“ (houses), a pocity „prázdnoty“ (emptiness) a „děr“ (holes).

potřebuje. Zkoumáme-li tento vztah z hlediska teorie Nancy Chodorow,<sup>299</sup> docházíme ke smutnému závěru, že Lauren se ocitá jakoby „v kleci.“ Její matka se k ní nechová mateřsky, zároveň však své dceři nedovoluje, aby se vysvobodila ze své závislosti na ní. Lauren tak kolísá mezi hledáním náhradní matky/lásky a snahou znovu získat svou biologickou matku. Dalším důsledkem nefunkčnosti tohoto vztahu jsou Laureniny problémy s hodnocením a vnímáním sebe sama. Lze říci, že především její matka má podíl na tom, že Lauren začne lhát, krást, předstírat nemoci, a snad i získá schopnost ony neduhy (respektive jejich příznaky) v sobě vyvolat (Munchausen's syndrome). Nicméně matčinu pozornost ani lásku Lauren nastálo nezíská. Zachrání jí však objevení vlastní kreativity, jež jí pomůže upoutat naši pozornost.

Zde se dostáváme ke vztahu autora a čtenáře (a tedy k teorii Marie Maclean). Existence tohoto vztahu je přirozeně nezbytností a jeho vývoj rozhodujícím způsobem ovlivňuje provedení/vyprávění (performance/telling)<sup>300</sup> díla. Oba analyzované texty jsou otevřené (open texts), tzn. nabízejí různé možnosti interpretace. Základem je vzbudit ve čtenáři zájem a získat si u něj autoritu (tj. čtenář musí přistoupit na dialog s autorem). To se oběma autorkám daří, třebaže různým způsobem a nestejně rychle. (Nicméně i to je záměrné.) Kaye Gibbons si nás získává hned první dobře a dlouze rozváženou větou a díky autentičnosti, živosti a vtipnosti své vypravěčky, respektive způsobu vyprávění, nás nikdy neztratí. K tomu, abychom s ní jako čtenáři spolupracovali a ona nás tak ještě více vtáhla do svého díla, vhodně využívá zejména tzv. mezer (gaps), jež jsme nuceni doplňovat.<sup>301</sup>

---

Většinu těchto slov a figur používá autorka jak doslova, tak metaforicky.

<sup>299</sup> Významná psychoanalytička a socioložka Nancy Chodorow uvádí problematiku vztahu matky a dcery na pole vědeckého diskursu svým průlomovým dílem *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. V diplomové práci čerpám vyjma tohoto díla také z její pozdější knihy *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

<sup>300</sup> Původně divadelní model „performance“ (tj. česky „představení“), jehož vnímání a interpretace se odvíjí od neustálého vzájemného působení herce a diváka, vztahuje Maclean na literární díla. Každé divadelní představení (též hry) je (logicky) odlišné, stejně tak je tomu i u čtení. Výše překládám „performance“ jako „provedení“ právě proto, že jde o různost jednotlivých provedení stejné hry.

<sup>301</sup> Jde o mezery tvořené technikou vyprávění, tj. metodou střídání časových rovin (time-shift narrative) a limitovaným úhlem pohledu (first-person narrative), dále potom (ne)užíváním

Slater se oproti Gibbons nesnaží o čtenářovu hladkou spolupráci. Naopak. Abychom skutečně pochopili její utrpení, tj. především její nejistotu/zmatení, musí nás vmanipulovat do svých pocitů. K tomu jí slouží zejména meta-vyprávění (metanarrative) o povaze pravdy a lži, faktu a fikce. Slater uznává tzv. narativní či emocionální pravdu<sup>302</sup> oproti pravdě historické (narrative/emotional truth versus historical truth). Běžný čtenář však takto pravdu nevnímá, nýbrž se snaží oddělit (tradičně vnímanou) lež od pravdy, fikci od faktu. Autorka tak dostává příležitost hrát si se čtenářem.<sup>303</sup> Jen co nás uchváčí kouskem pravdy, už ji znovu zpochybní, či dokonce zpochybní svou věrohodnost jakožto vypravěčky. Tímto způsobem dostává čtenáře do situace totožné s její. Jsme zmatení, nejistí a možná především frustrovaní. Posléze zjistíme, jaká jsou pravidla hry a – osvícení novým věděním - se necháme nést poetičností autorčina stylu.

Literární dílo (tj. i příběh utrpení/traumatu) je realitou samo o sobě. Chceme-li do této reality vstoupit, musíme přistoupit na dialog s ní/jejím autorem (trpícím). Tento dialog může být přitakáváním či hádkou, ale musí *být*. Jedině tak se realita daného díla stane tou naší, tj. co možná nejlépe<sup>304</sup> pochopíme sdělovanou bolest. Formální a jiné prostředky, jichž autorky užívají k sdělení utrpení/traumatu svých hrdinek, by neměly žádný účinek, pokud bychom s autorkami nespolupracovali, popř. nezápasili. Jinými slovy, nelze sdělit utrpení/trauma, když nikdo nenaslouchá .

Závěrem, který vychází z teze o relační povaze překonávání traumatu, dospíváme k zjištění, že se obě autorky pokusily vyrovnat s traumaty svého dětství prostřednictvím jazyka. Psaním svých děl vstoupily do dialogu samy se sebou (snaha o sebeporozumění), respektive s jazykem jako takovým, (neboť lze říct, že subjekt/“já“ je

---

interpunkce v dialozích.

<sup>302</sup> Tzn. např. je-li nám určitý den v červenci natolik chladno, až máme pocit, že mrzne a sněží, pak opravdu toho dne v červenci mrzlo a sněžilo, bez ohledu na to, že meteorologický ústav hlásil nejvyšší letní teploty.

<sup>303</sup> Dalo by se říci „na kočku a na myš.“

<sup>304</sup> V úvodu diplomové práce bylo zdůrazněno, že porozumění bolesti, již sami necítíme, bude vždy omezené. Avšak čím podobnější jsou naše zkušenosti, tím lépe se můžeme do autorčiny slov vcítit a tím spíše nás dílo samo skrze možnost *ztotožnění se* osloví. A nepochybně též (alespoň zčásti) utěší.

konstituován jazykem), ale především také do dialogu se čtenářem (snaha o nalezení porozumění u ostatních). Autorky si tak pomyslně rozšiřují svůj „terapeutický kruh“ a potvrzují snahu o řešení psychického traumatu jakožto záležitost mezilidských vztahů (relational concept). Kdyby člověk neměl možnost „vztažení se/vyprávění“ (relating), trauma by zůstalo traumatem bez příležitosti jeho uchopení/pochopení, a proto bez možností úlevy a následného vyrovnání s ním, tj. osvobození se od něj. Právě sdílením utrpení počiná proces uspořádávání, vyrovnávání se a uzdravování. Proměňováním bolesti v příběh proměňujeme bolest ve smysl. Jak říká Elaine Scarry, jazyk je prostředkem, kterým může být bolest vyzdvižena do světa a zmenšena.<sup>305</sup>

V diplomové práci *No Pain, No Gain* jsem si nekladla za cíl vyčerpávajícím způsobem interpretovat dané tituly, práce by nicméně měla posloužit jako seznámení s autorkami a jejich díly. Vzhledem k tomu, že se jedná o mladé americké autorky píšící (mimo jiné) o vztahu matky a dcery, bylo by jistě zajímavé prozkoumat je pod zorným úhlem genderových studií. Jelikož díla pojednávají o utrpení/traumatu a způsobech vyrovnávání se s ním, nabízí se další bádání z čistě psychologického či etického hlediska. V neposlední řadě by mohl být přínosný rozbor těchto literárních děl prostřednictvím různých teorií jazyka, neboť právě jazyku se utrpení/trauma nejvíce vzpírá, ale přesto je (alespoň zčásti) sdělitelné.

---

<sup>305</sup> Scarry, p.54 (překlad můj).



## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

### Primary Sources:

Gibbons, Kaye: *Ellen Foster*, New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Slater, Lauren: *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, New York: Random House, 2000.

### Secondary Sources:

Abernathy, Jeff: *Passing through Darkness: Sara Flanigan and Kaye Gibbons: Search for Hope*, In: *Same: To Hell and Back: Race and Betrayal in the Southern Novel*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.

Brooks, Peter and Woloch, Alex ed.: *Whose Freud?: The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.

Caruth, Cathy: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Chodorow, Nancy: *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Chodorow, Nancy: *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

Cuddon, J.A.: *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982.

DeMarr, Mary Jean: *Kaye Gibbons: A Critical Companion*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Felman, Shoshana and Laub, Dori: *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York: Routledge, 1992.

Folks, Jeffrey: *Obligations of the Dispossessed: The Ethical Vision of Kaye Gibbons's Ellen Foster and A Virtuous Woman*, In: *Folks, Jeffrey: From Richard Wright to Toni Morrison: Ethics in Modern & Postmodern American Narrative*, New York : P. Lang, 2001.

- Freud, Sigmund: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, New York: W.W.Norton and Co., 1989.
- Freud, Sigmund: *Mojžiš a monotheizmus*, Bratislava: Danubiapress, 1995.
- Gibbons, Kaye: *How I Became a Writer: My Mother, Literature, and a Life Split Neatly into Two Halves: A Nonfiction Piece*, Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1988.
- Guinn, Matthew: *Mediation, Interpolation: Bobbie Ann Manson and Kaye Gibbons*, In: Guinn, Matthew: *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South*, Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 2000.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy: *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, London: Arnold, 1998.
- Jordan, Shirley Marie: *Kaye Gibbons*, In: *Broken Silences: Interviews with Black and White Women Writers*, New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993.
- Lederbuchová, Ladislava: *Průvodce literárním dílem*, Praha: H&H, 2002.
- Lewis, Nancy: *Kaye Gibbons: Her Full-Time Women*, In: Folks, Jeffrey ed.: *Southern Writers at Century's End*, Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1997.
- Maclean, Marie: *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment*, London: Routledge, 1988.
- Petrů, Eduard: *Úvod do studia literární vědy*, Olomouc: Rubico, 2000.
- Powell, Danyne Romine: *Parting the Curtains: Interviews with Southern Writers*, Winston-Salem: Blair, 1994.
- Procházka, Martin: *Literary Theory: An Historical Introduction*, Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Arts, 1997.
- Procházka, Martin a kol.: *Lectures on American Literature*, Prague: Karolinum, 2002.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul: *Life/Situations*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul: *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Scarry, Elaine: *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Wellek, René, and Warren, Austin: *Theory of Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Woolf, Virginia: *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.

## Consulted Works:

- Agamben, Giorgio: *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York: Zone Books, 1999.
- Austin, John Langshaw: *Jak udělat něco slovy*, Praha: Filosofia, 2000.
- Barthes, Roland: *The Death of the Author*, In: Barthes, Roland: *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1977.
- Bement, Douglas and Taylor, Ross: *The Fabric of Fiction*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943
- Birch, David: *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Brewster, William, ed.: *The Specimens of Narration*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1895
- Brooks, Cleanth, ed.: *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Vintage, 1984.
- Černý, Jiří: *Malé dějiny lingvistiky*, Praha: Portál, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques: *Limited Inc a b c*, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988.
- Easthope, Antony: *Literary Into Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1991.
- Easthope, Antony and McGowan, Kate, ed.: *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994.
- Genette, Gérard: *Figures of Literary Discourse*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Green, Keith and LeBihan, Jill: *Critical Theory and Practice: A Coursebook*, London: Routledge, 1996.
- Hall, Stuart, ed.: *Representation, Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: SAGE Publicatins Ltd, 1997.
- Forster, E.M.: *Aspects of the Novel*, London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Frankl, Viktor: *Teorie a terapie neuróz*, Praha: Grada Publishing, 1999.
- Kinney, Clare Regan: *Strategies of Poetic Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

- Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits: A Selection*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977.
- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark: *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Murray, Patrick: *Literary Criticism*, Dublin: Smurfit Books Limited, 1978.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich: *Tak pravil Zarathustra*, Praha: Odeon, 1967.
- Rogers, Carl: *Způsob bytí*, Praha: Portál, 1998.
- Rogge, Jan-Uwe: *Dětské strachy a úzkosti*, Praha: Portál, 1999.
- Sontag, Susan: *Regarding the Pain of Others*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Wellek, René: *The Literary Theory and Aesthetics of the Prague School*, Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1969.

#### **Articles and Web Resources:**

- Auchter, Amanda: *Country Worth Visiting*, August 22, 2004, [www.amazon.com/gp/product/0385487398/104-6882972-0343113?v=glance&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0385487398/104-6882972-0343113?v=glance&n=283155).
- Bell, Pearl: *Southern Discomfort*, In: *The New Republic*, Vol. 198, No. 9, February 29, 1988, p.41.
- Brien, Donna Lee: *Being Honest about Lying: Defining the Limits of Auto/biographical writing*, April 2002, Vol.6, No.1, [www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/april02/brien.htm](http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/april02/brien.htm).
- Crew, Hilary: *Feminist Theories and the Voices of Mothers and Daughters in Selected African-American Literature for Young Adults*, 1994, [www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/books/CREW65.pdf](http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~kvander/books/CREW65.pdf).
- Fisher, Rob: *Redeeming the Memory of Suffering*, June 2002, [www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid1/hid1s1.htm](http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid1/hid1s1.htm).
- Fodrey, Crystal: *The Necessity of Truth in Creative Nonfiction*, In: *Thoreau's Rooster*, Spring 2004, vol.3, [www.assumption.edu/users/land/v3essays/crystal\\_fodrey.html](http://www.assumption.edu/users/land/v3essays/crystal_fodrey.html).
- Goldsmith, Francisca: *Slater, Lauren: Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*, In: *Kliatt*, May 2002, vol.36, No.3, p.34.
- Grover, Jan Zita: *Unreliable Narrator*, In: *Women's Review of Books*, July 2002, v.19, p.43.

- Hoffman, Alice: *Shopping for a New Family*, In: *New York Times Book Review*, May 31, 1987, p. 13.
- Ingram, Richard: *Life Plagiarizing Illness: Lauren Slater's Lying*, September 2001, <http://nasty.cx/archives/000398.php>.
- Makowsky, Veronica: 'The Only Hard Part Was the Food: ' Recipes for Self-Nurture in Kaye Gibbon's Novels, In: *The Southern Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Nos.2-3, 1992, p.103.
- McCauley, Stephen, 'He's Gone. Go Start the Coffee,' In: *The New York Times Book Review*, April 11, 1993, p. 9.
- Nash, Amanda: *We All Fall Down*, In: *Women's Review of Books*, October 2000, v.18, p.14.
- Nutkiewicz, Michael: *Towards an Ethic of Suffering: A Rejoinder to Jamie Mayerfeld*, In: *APS Bulletin*, Nov./Dec. 2002, vol.12, No.6, <http://www.ampainsoc.org/pub/bulletin/nov02/path1.htm>.
- Park, Mary, an editorial review of *Lying*, [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp\\_proddesc\\_0/104-6882972-13?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp_proddesc_0/104-6882972-13?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155).
- Perring, Christian, *Book Review - Lying*, September 1, 2000, [www.mentalhelp.net](http://www.mentalhelp.net).
- Schweizer, Harold: *The Question of Meaning in Suffering*, June 2002, <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/mso/hid/hid1/hid1s1.htm>.
- Woodring, Susan: *Quick-Sand Rules and Shapeless Places*, January 5, 2002, [www.amazon.com/gp/cdp/member/reviews/A31CZ50SUXBO9H/3?%5Fencoding=UTF8](http://www.amazon.com/gp/cdp/member/reviews/A31CZ50SUXBO9H/3?%5Fencoding=UTF8).
- Author Interview* (Lauren Slater) at [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/prozac\\_diary-author.asp#top](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/prozac_diary-author.asp#top).
- Editorial review of *Ellen Foster* at [http://windsorlibrary.org/EllenFoster\\_k20050125.doc](http://windsorlibrary.org/EllenFoster_k20050125.doc).
- Editorial Review of *Ellen Foster*, Oprah Book Club® Selection, October 1997, [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp\\_proddesc\\_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0375703055/ref=dp_proddesc_0/104-6882972-0343113?%5Fencoding=UTF8&n=283155).
- Review of *Ellen Foster*, In: *Kirkus Reviews*, March 15, 1987, p. 404.
- Review of *Lying*, In: *Washington Post Book World*, May 19, 1996, p. 13.

Kaye Gibbons – Home Page: <http://www.kayegibbons.com>.

Kaye Gibbons - Biography:  
[www.randomhouse.com/vintage/gibbons/gibbons.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/gibbons/gibbons.html).

Lauren Slater - Biography: [www.bloomsbury.com/authors/](http://www.bloomsbury.com/authors/)

Lauren Slater – Biography:  
[http://us.penguinroup.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0\\_1000038061,00.html](http://us.penguinroup.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0,,0_1000038061,00.html).

Wikipedia – Free Encyclopedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>