

Tuesday, December 12th: Writing/Discussion Prompts for *Lying* (Part 4 & Afterword)

- At home, you should write in response to the following questions/prompts. Then, in class on Tuesday, 12/12, we will devote time to working in groups to discuss Part 4 & the Afterword of *Lying*. I have started you off by posing the questions/prompts below in relation to *Lying*. The prompts come out of this coming week's reading, but you should feel free to bring any relevant aspect of *Lying* (including earlier parts) into your discussion.
- **As always, be as specific as possible with your responses, and provide evidence—with citations—to support your claims and analysis.**
- Now that we've finished reading the entire memoir and have discussed many of its issues/themes, we are starting to look ahead to Essay #3, so you should all take notes based on your discussion today in preparation for that next assignment. Since you have to choose your own topic and form a specific argument about the memoir for this next essay, these prompts (along with the handout from Part 3) will help you to start brainstorming major themes of the text and offer possible ways to approach the assignment.

Part Four: The Stage of Recovery (Chapter 8: Amazing Grace)

1. Think about the title of this part of the memoir ("The Stage of Recovery") ... in what ways do her experiences in college and AA represent "recovery"?
2. Discuss Lauren's "fake" interview for the newspaper (for which she interviewed herself, under the name of the interviewer Juliet Epstein) (172-174).

3. At the Brandeis Counseling Center, the counselor calls her out on her lies, and she makes up a story about him being a “pervert” and runs away (to not face the truth) (174-177). Later on in the chapter we witness Lauren’s argument with Dr. Neu: she tells him she lied and faked seizures, and he says her religiosity (and exaggeration) are merely part of her personality profile (199-202). Discuss these scenes and their significance in terms of the overall message and narrative of the book.

4. On page 185, Lauren writes, “My words surprised me. They were so simple and direct, and right then things lifted a little, because what I had said was true.” Discuss how/why her “truth-telling” is productive/healthful for her.

5. Just as in earlier parts of her memoir she uses epilepsy, seizures, falling, and sex as metaphors, in Part 4 Lauren uses alcoholism (and her experiences in AA) as a metaphor for what she has gone through with her “disease.” Discuss this important section of the book and provide analysis of it. I have listed some excerpts/ideas below to start you off:

“They thought I was shy, but really I had lied, and then gotten tangled in the lie, and I didn’t want to do it more into the microphone. Most of the time my lie didn’t bother me, because AA, like any disease, is about so much more than its symptoms. AA is about life, and honesty, God and desperation and desire, and these things are relevant to anyone” (183).

Consider the similarities between alcoholism and epilepsy (186-7).

The 5th step of the 12 steps of AA (being honest/coming clean): “In a way, this memoir is like my fifth step. I am not an alcoholic and I may not really be an epileptic either. Perhaps I’ve just felt fitful my whole life; perhaps I’m using metaphor to tell my tale, a tale I know no other way of telling, a tale of my past, my mother and me, a tale of pains and humiliations and illnesses so subtle and nuanced I could never find the literal words; would it matter? Is metaphor in memoir, in *life*, an alternate form of honesty or simply an evasion? This is what I want to know” (192).

“This, I thought, was my chance to tell the truth. They wanted my story, I would tell them my story. I was not an alcoholic, I suffered from a different disease. I had told them I was an alcoholic because in some deep sense it seemed true. 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

9. As a group, read out loud from the bottom of p. 211 to the end of that section on p. 214. Discuss.

Afterword

This very brief (just three pages!) section is the final word on the text. Read parts of it out loud (that you find particularly compelling/noteworthy) and discuss this part in relation to the entire memoir.

Discuss the following two quotes, in the context of the memoir:

“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” (220).

“diagnoses itself is a narrative phenomenon” (221)