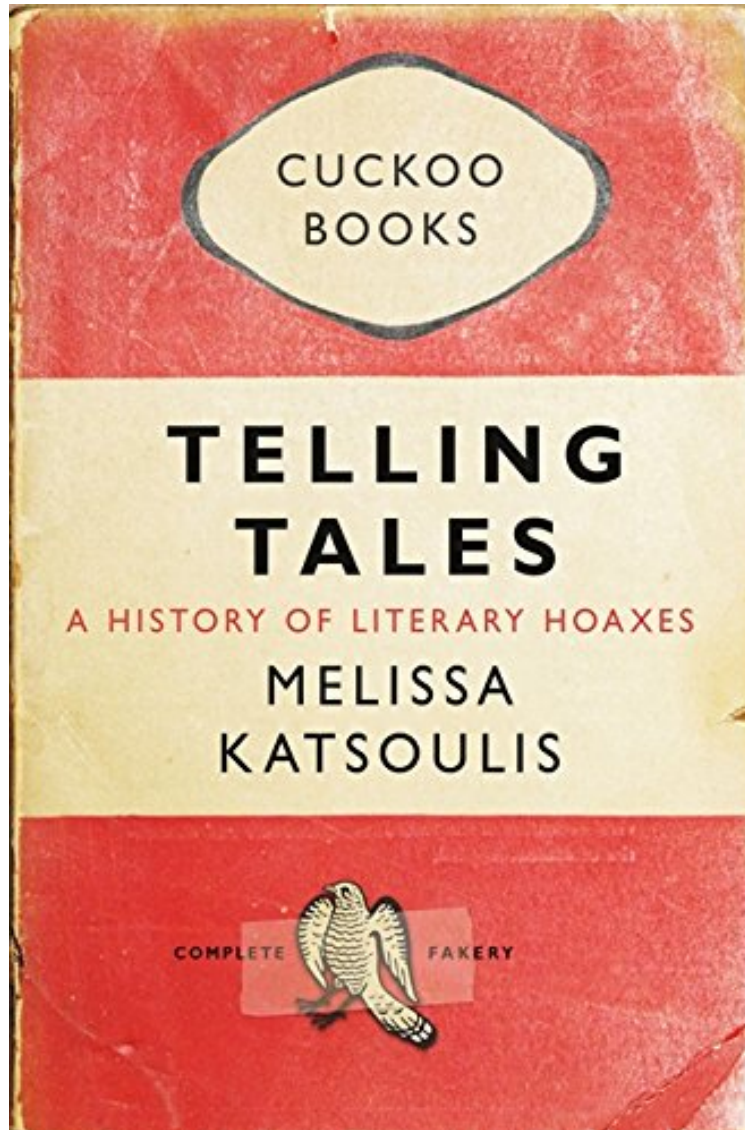


[Read free] Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes

Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes

Melissa Katsoulis

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#2701450 in Books 2009-09-20 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.72 x .87 x 5.391, 1.00 #File Name: 1849010803336 pages | File size: 62.Mb

Melissa Katsoulis : Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Case Studies and a Great VoiceBy carolineMelissa Katsoulis's, Telling Tales explores some of the most interesting literary hoaxes in the history of...well, literature, and is skeptical in nature. She discusses some of the more popular literary hoaxes such as the Hitler Diaries and James Frey's work, A Million Little Pieces. In fact, Frey's A Million Little Pieces has become synonymous with the term "literary

hoax." The book was published as a memoir of James Frey's life in and out of rehab and focuses on his battle - or "battle" - against drugs and his final success. The book was publicly lauded and even put on Oprah's famous book club list. I won't go into the details of Frey's spiral to the bottom here but there definitely was one. James Frey's novel was eventually proven not to be a memoir at all but a fictional piece. Oprah Winfrey as well as Frey's publishers were left embarrassed for having been tricked by James Frey's scam. But James Frey was not the first literary hoaxer - not by a long shot. And Melissa Katsoulis goes all the way back to the eighteenth century in her discussion of literary hoaxers. Katsoulis also focuses on the lesser known but just as intriguing hoaxers such as William Henry Ireland, a teenage hoaxer from the eighteenth century, and Marlo Morgan, a woman who fabricated a story of her kidnapping by a tribe of native Aborigines (in fact, there are quite a few Australian-related hoaxes that this novel explores). The book is arranged in sections with each section pertaining to a different time period, location, or type of hoax. Those sections are as follows: the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century, Native Americans, Celebrity Testaments, Australia, Memoirs, Post-Modern Ventriloquists, Holocaust Memoirs, Religion, and Entrapment Hoaxes. According to Katsoulis, there are three main types of hoaxes: the genuine hoax, the entrapment hoax, and the mock hoax. She describes the "genuine hoax" as a hoax or scam done with the intention of its nature to never be revealed. That is, the hoax is performed and carried out in hopes (and expectation) that the hoax will never be exposed as a sham. This is the more well-known version of a literary hoax and Katsoulis explains that these hoaxes may be done for "financial, ideological, or emotional gain." And throughout the novel, Katsoulis gives examples of hoaxers who belong in this category: hoaxers who did what they did for fame, money, attention, and, in the pitiful yet fascinating case of William Henry Ireland, in hopes of gaining the attention of a father. The second type of hoax, the "entrapment hoax," are hoaxes done by people who intend to "prank" a professional group or community such as an academic group, a publisher, or a literary community - a "just for grins" category of hoaxes. These hoaxes are more arrogant in nature, intending to show off the hoaxer's wit and intellect and fool the professionals. The final group of hoaxes found in Katsoulis's novel is the "mock hoaxes." Experimental writers perform these hoaxes purposefully. However, the "hoaxers" openly acknowledge their pieces as inauthentic. Mock hoaxes are written by writers who "play conscious tricks with the very notion of authorship [in order] to create a voice which is neither quite theirs nor someone else's." The section in Katsoulis's book, Post-Modern Ventriloquists, is comprised primarily of these types of hoaxes. Katsoulis's writing is funny, intelligent, and sassy. Though the book is, in essence, a list of literary hoaxes organized by date and type, it doesn't read like a textbook and Katsoulis's tone and writing style bleeds throughout her book, making it entertaining as well as interesting. She is a clever writer and she describes the rise and fall of each hoax as if it were a short story giving each hoaxer their moment in the spotlight before moving on to the next one (eerily reminiscent of each hoaxer's impact on their society at their peak). Since each hoax gets just a few pages and due to the organization of the book, *Telling Tales* is a quick read, highly enjoyable, and will give the reader a chance to dip into the world of the literary hoaxer and understand their story. Katsoulis's novel does not attempt to answer any questions concerning pseudoscience, hoaxes, or scams. Instead, her novel is meant to be informational: a glimpse into the world of some of the more well-known or interesting literary hoaxers of our time. But Katsoulis does more than appease our general voyeuristic tendencies - Katsoulis gives the reader the opportunity to take a look inside the head of these hoaxers. What inspired them? What motivated them? It is the inspirations, aspirations, and motivations of the hoaxers that Katsoulis finds most interesting and, in the end, it is what makes these hoaxers not only interesting, but historically unforgettable. And in just a few pages, Katsoulis is able to capture the essence of each hoaxer's goals, intentions, and ultimate failures. Each story is definitely not a comprehensive biography, but it is enough to give the reader a sense of each hoaxer's psychology and actions so that the reader can judge those actions accordingly. Did the hoaxer have good reason for doing what he did? Did he deserve the disgrace and the shame? Should history judge the hoaxer a little more harshly? Or perhaps a little less harshly? These are all questions that Katsoulis's novel offers the reader. Answering them, however, are the responsibility of the reader.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Delightful By
travelswithadiplomat This is fascinating. Melissa Katsoulis has produced an engaging anecdotal book about some of history's greatest literary hoaxes. Most people will have heard of James Frey and his fooling of Oprah Winfrey. What you won't know is that America's first chatshow lady was suckered twice. This book reveals all. What makes it fascinating is that we're not only treated to a "fooled y'all" set of delights, but we learn how such hoaxes can form the basis for terrible historical events. For example, whilst the "Holocaust hoax memoirs" are despicable, the entire "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" is a disturbing continuing link to changing world history. There is the amusing proof that Dan Brown was right all along to write a fictional version of "The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail" given its authors were duped by one fantasist - Pierre Plantard. Katsoulis groups her hoaxes into three types: "the genuine hoax, the entrapment hoax and the mock hoax." It is clear from these that for them to be successful the reader must not only be gullible, but want to accept the ideas/fiction therein. 'Misery Memoirs' are a classic example of success tapped into the psyche of those who need to either empathise or delight in the misfortune of others or simply jump on the "Oprah Book Club" roadshow. Jean Shepherd's 'I, Libertine' is a perfect proof of human herd mentality what with it being a hoax about a book that people claimed to have read yet never existed. Ignominy, and ostracizing are often the results as many of the hoaxes. Examples abound such as those coming out of Australia or the sad tale of Canadian Maria

Monk. Some earn plaudits showing they can enhance an author's reputation, such as Mark Twain, or they can give us much amusement, for example Bevis Hillier's dig at A.N. Wilson (who, incidentally, comes across as thoroughly unpleasant in this book - something that has made me non-desirous of reading any of his work). From fake Shakespeare to the Hitler Diaries...this book is utterly fascinating. It's not a one-sitting read; rather a coffee book guilty pleasure. As readers we can smile wryly at those hoaxes we realize we've been part of simply by buying the books mentioned or making statements which we can trace back to these hoaxes as 'evidence'; as readers we can enjoy this and walk away a little wiser, and perhaps a little more prepared to engage in critical thinking when we read the next book or article on social media rather than blind acceptance of what we are being told. 9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. True Tales of Fakes By Rob Hardy It didn't all start with James Frey. The writer was originally lauded by Oprah for his frank and moving memoir of overcoming addiction, *A Million Little Pieces*, which included stories about his having to undergo root-canal surgery without anesthetic or associating with the worst of characters in prison. Frey lost Oprah's support when researchers showed that the story wasn't so much a memoir as a novel told in the first person, and that Frey had imagined many of the most dramatic parts. Literary hoaxes have a long history, even going back to the ancient Greeks. It is fun to read about people, especially experts, getting fooled, and in *Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes* (Constable), Melissa Katsoulis has given amusing short histories of fifty of them, starting in the eighteenth century, and including Frey and other contemporaries. The best of the stories show hoaxes, even after being revealed, that took on a life of their own and continued to influence readers. All of the stories show hoaxers as prankish, selfish, vengeful, or eager for fame, and many of them show that the biggest tool in the hoaxer's box is the eagerness of the public to believe a good story. Katsoulis borrows a classification of hoaxes into three categories, often overlapping. There is the "genuine hoax," the attempt dishonestly to pass off a literary concoction as something it is not. The prime example of a genuine hoax is that of William Henry Ireland, who in the 1790s took advantage of the Shakespeare boom to try to win the admiration of his father. There were contradictions and anachronisms in the documents he turned up, but they didn't bother the father nor the other Shakespeare-boosters of the time. William eventually had to confess that he had fabricated all the documents, but his father never believed him, since he thought William was just too stupid to have fooled so many people for so long. The second type of hoax is the "entrapment hoax." The hoaxer seeks to deceive a particular professor or publisher or literary community. After the hoax is accepted as genuine, the hoaxer reveals how clever it was and how stupid the dupes were to have accepted it. The best entrapment hoax was poetry composed by a couple of poets in Australia who considered the experimentalist, avant-garde poets of their day pretentious and unpoetic. They faked such poetry, invented a dead poet as an author, and got it published in a modernist poetry journal. But some of the poetry is good, and the invented poet is still "one of Australia's cultural figures and, still, one of her most talked-about poets." The final type is the "mock hoax" in which a writer experiments with writing in a voice not previously used. Fern Gravel was a newly published poet in 1940, and her homey poems were popular. Six years after the book came out, the actual author thought that it was time to confess the truth. He was James Norman Hall, who was famous as an author of adventure novels like *Mutiny on the Bounty*. There are many good tales here. In 2001, the gangster Michael Gambino published a memoir that revealed the inner workings of the Mafia, complete with porn and cocaine-dealing. But Gambino was not Gambino, he was Michael Budaj, a Chicago factory worker with German origins who idealized gangsters and the closest he could come to being one was to put his imaginings into a book. The Hitler Diaries proved embarrassing for historians and handwriting experts who claimed they were authentic, even though "Hitler" wrote preposterous side notes to himself like "Must get tickets for the Olympic games for Eva." There have been hoaxers who claimed to be writing memories of the Holocaust, or of Hiroshima. There was Grey Owl who in 1937, an Apache clad in skins and moccasins, lectured the residents of Buckingham Palace about the need to protect the world from greedy developers. It was a genuinely good lesson then and now, but he was a middle-class Englishman who kept up the Native American pose for decades. Marlo Morgan wrote *Mutant Message Down Under*, about how she was kidnapped and initiated by a mysterious band of Australian Aborigines. She made millions, even though Aboriginal elders denounced her and though there is no evidence that her abductors even existed. Katsoulis writes that the book was "based, seemingly, on a smattering of knowledge about Native Americans and a thorough grounding in *Crocodile Dundee*". There is the wonderful story of how radio talker Jean Shepherd got listeners to ask at bookstores for a nonexistent novel, and enough of them did so that the stores began to tell them the book was "on order", and all New York was talking about how fine a novel it was. There are many more tales here, all stories that are amusing and are revealing of endearing and frustrating human foibles. Hilariously, the publisher has brought this out as a paperback with a tattered-looking cover, complete with a fake piece of tape on it, listing the publisher as "Cuckoo Books." It is a rip-off of the old design for Penguin paperbacks. The jacket is fake, but the stories inside are true stories about fakes. As far as I can tell.

When Dionysus the Renegade faked a Sophocles text in 400BC (cunningly inserting the acrostic 'Heraclides is ignorant of letters') to humiliate an academic rival, he paved the way for two millennia of increasingly outlandish literary hoaxers. The path from his mischievous stunt to more serious tricksters like the controversial memoirist and Oprah-duper James Frey, takes in every sort of writer: from the religious zealot to the bored student, via the vengeful

academic and the out-and-out joker. But whether hoaxing for fame, money, politics or simple amusement, each perpetrator represents something unique about why we write. Their stories speak volumes about how reading, writing and publishing have grown out of the fine and private places of the past into big-business, TV-book-club-led mass-marketplaces which, some would say, are ripe for the ripping. For the first time, the complete history of this fascinating sub-genre of world literature is revealed. Suitable for bookworms of all ages and persuasions, this is true crime for people who don't like true crime, and literary history for the historically illiterate. A treat to read right through or to dip into, it will make you think twice next time you slip between the covers of an author you don't know...

A brisk, breezy and hugely entertaining survey of literary hoaxes over the past couple of centuries. -- James Lovegrove
* Financial Times * A joy to read. * The Independent on Sunday * Riveting. * Daily Mail * Irresistible ... lots to enjoy. * Wood Vale * Highly entertaining. * Good Book Guide * Katsoulis revels in highlighting the most ridiculous details of the hoaxes and is especially good at showing how they suddenly took on a life of their own and escaped their creator's clutches. * Sunday Telegraph * This lively entertaining volume gallops through the centuries, taking in misery memoirs, pretend nuns and the Priory of Sion conspiracy. It leaves you reeling at some people's gullibility. * Daily Telegraph * Hugely enjoyable: amusing, literate, learned and perceptive ... Katsoulis is a wonderfully wise and witty cicerone through the luxuriant jungles of literary fraudulence. Telling Tales is a delight from start to finish, right down to the cheeky cover. * Sunday Times * About the Author
Melissa Katsoulis is a journalist and writer. She has written for The Times, where she also worked on the books desk, the Sunday Telegraph, the Financial Times, The Tablet and the Ham and High. She lives in London.