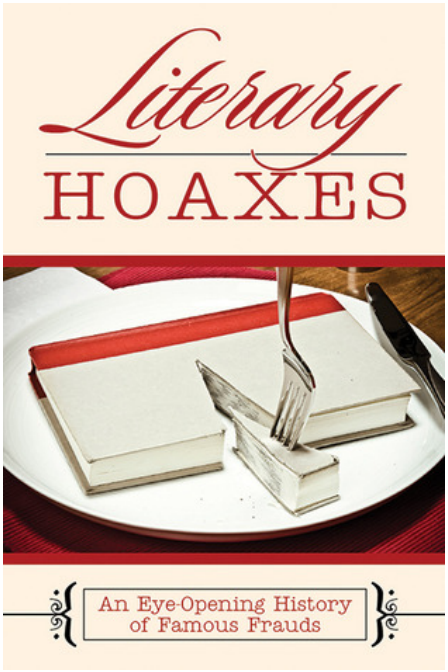

Literary Hoaxes: An Eye-Opening History of Famous Frauds

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The ultimate reader's-guide to the works that fooled publishers, readers, and critics the world over. When Dionysus the Renegade faked a Sophocles text in 400 BC (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 fake Howard Hughes "autobiography" by Clifford Irving, 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 . . . .

Literary Hoaxes: An Eye-Opening History of Famous Frauds Details

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From Reader Review Literary Hoaxes: An Eye-Opening History of Famous Frauds for online ebook

Sesana says

This seems to be a different edition of Telling Tales: A History Of Literary Hoaxes, from a different publisher.

I'm not exactly sure why I'm so fascinated by literary hoaxes. Well, hoaxes of all stripes, really. Obviously, I'm not the only one. Look at how many there are on Wikipedia! So this was a must-read book for me. Fortunately for Katsoulis, her subject matter is going to keep me riveted no matter what, because the writing honestly wasn't that great. That said, I'd still recommend this book, because it's just so interesting. Sure, you could probably get much of the same information off of Wikipedia, but there's actually more detail in most of the entries in the book than in the corresponding Wikipedia articles.

Each entry is roughly ten pages long, some longer and some shorter, and give a fairly complete idea of the work in question, how and why it was written, and how the hoax came to light. Not every literary hoax in the world is included, by far, and most of the ones that Katsoulis chose are particularly interesting examples. The most fun hoax was definitely I, Libertine, a collective prank by the host and listeners of a radio show that eventually became reality. And the prize for sheer chutzpah goes to Clifford Irving, who claimed to have helped Howard Hughes write his autobiography while Hughes was still alive.

This was just so much fun for me to read. There's a wide range of motives and reactions on display, from Irving's sheer greed to pranks to motives that are harder to explain and understand. A few of the stories might not be, strictly speaking, hoaxes. I'm not sure if Mark Twain intended for anyone to buy those absurd news stories, and Fern Gravel is a fairly straightforward example of an author using a pen name to for writing outside his normal work. Those, and a few others like them, probably don't belong in the book. But I can't protest too much, because I really enjoyed reading them.

Vonia says

Granted, not exactly well written. The thing is, I loved the material so much, I overlooked the subpar quality of writing... Almost. How to explain, now, how the writing was subpar, exactly? Well... It felt like an average freshman university paper. Maybe even an excelling high school senior, using a thesaurus. Cliches were used, transitions were not exactly smooth, the research was there, but in the end seemed executed poorly. I can almost imagine the author impressed with herself as she puts the finishing touches on her "ingenious" categorization of chapters (). Also located more than one grammatical error, so not sure where the Editors were.... She also used practically the same words for differing descriptions. In other words, university student using thesaurus?

Mark Twain to Victorian Age poets; Holocaust survivors whom made up more (why would anyone fictionalize your life when your true life story is already better) to those pretending to having been; Australian (according to the author the country where this is most prevalent?); The New Yorker's Jonah Lehrer to personal favorite James Frey, whom blindsided, humiliated, magicianed Oprah before the entire nation.... But then was given the same in return + some. Why my personal favorite? It is not because of the attention, but because I truly love his writing & cannot understand how he could have kinda-sorta-maybe-

we-will-see done this to his career by unnecessarily fabricating minor details. (Yes, Vonia is so upset you are seeing pleonasm here...)

Anyways, I was intrigued by the information, so I am thankful for her research. It was more of a fun beach read, I would say, then what this is being marketed as. What else did I learn? These occur far more often than I realized. Are still occurring ever more often than that, with those that have been undiscovered. That, am I to conscientiously dedicate resources to completing my own memoir, I need to be aware that plagiarism is not what I originally believed it to defined as. Apparently, I can plagiarize myself. Which I am having trouble understanding still. A little. Oh, we also reconfirmed that Oprah can, would, likely already does rule the world.

Sandi says

This book interested me because the line between literary hoax and plagiarism isn't always clear. Both involve erroneous identity, though hoaxes trend towards the wildly original rather than wildly derivative end of the scale—at times more original because the author is freed from their own reputation.

Unfortunately, the books itself was inconsistently written. It was funny at many points, and--very importantly--it resisted sounding like a bunch of Wikipedia pages despite being divided up into short sections. Another strength was that, in the introduction, the author made an effort to understand the hoaxes in a somewhat-scholarly manner, synthesizing and setting-up a good deal of information. Some other reviewers have spoken about the author's bias, but that's not an issue for me—I think the author did a good job, actually, in infusing her personality into her writing, while maintaining a nuanced position (basically: hoaxing has ethical problems and some do real damage, but can be fun or seemingly "harmless" and create art). In this sense, it's a very journalistically-written book (in the vein of Mallon's Stolen Words, with a hint of Mary Roach-ism), and that's not a bad thing—this is a fun tour, not a correspondence course.

However, I have mixed feelings on the book's organization. The short chapters are organized around too many variables: date (18th C., 19th C.), Nation (Australia, Native Americans), genre (Memoir), topic (Religion), motivation (Entrapment), and authorial character? (Post-modern Ventriloquists). Many of these hoaxes could fit in multiple categories, and though the author seems to have done her best in grouping them into the most obvious category, it all seems scattershot and ununified. Worse still, within these "chapters," the 3-10 subsections—one for each hoaxer—are sometimes titled by the real author (Thomas Chatterton, Joan Lowell), others by their alias (J. T. LeRoy), and the whole "Celebrity Testaments" section by the subject of the hoax. If I were trying to find the name of a particular hoaxer, I'm at the mercy of luck and memory, particularly because there's no index. Some sections also have mini-introductions, which would be a good device to add unity to the book if all of the sections had them, but they do not. Finally, there is no conclusion, and the book ends seemingly arbitrarily.

Were it not already published, I'd say this book would be promising if given a good bit of editorial work, reorganizing the chapters, correcting some grammatical errors throughout, trimming here and there, and making the author write a consistent and new intro for each chapter as well as a fleshed-out conclusion. Oh well. The book is still interesting, even if just as a collection of some hoaxes that I didn't already know about.

Tim says

A great account of literary hoaxes and swindles. My favourite were the cases where the hoaxers produced their finest work under a pseudonym, whilst attempting to mock the establishment.

Christine says

This book takes us on a tour of famous literary hoaxes starting with Dionysius and his fake Sophocles through the Hilter Diaries and on to James Frey. The book does distinguish between hoaxes and plagiarism and explains the basic reasons people perpetrate hoaxes and then in very organized segments and chronologically arranged chapters, gives the reader a short taste of the various hoaxes.
I really wanted to love this book but the truth is I didn't. The writing was a little "textbook" (which this book does not pretend to be) so it did not flow for me as well as it could have and left me skimming over parts, when a more entertaining writing style might have had me captivated.
That being said I still think it is a worthwhile to pick up from the library and get an overview of some important literary history. Two things this book did successfully was peak my interest in a couple of the hoaxes enough for me so that I will be exploring them a little more thoroughly and, truly amaze me at the tenacity, dedication, patience and sheer chutzpah these hoaxers had to carry out their schemes. Goodness only knows what might have been created if they had put their creative talents to legitimate use.

Greg says

When asked why he had pulled a poetry hoax that fooled the editor of the anthology *Books in Canada*, the poet David Solway, said, "Canadians are not very exciting people...they need to be poked."

I would disagree, in one of my handful of visits to our neighbors to the North I found myself in the middle of a riot over something that us American's would probably have just grumbled loudly about, but which Canadians responded by throwing an awful lot of flaming things through the air and breaking shit. But this book isn't about this or that, I just thought I'd share that one quote from the book.

This book I thought would be interesting, and it was. Sort of. It was also yet another disappointment in this sort of genre of book, the hundred-thousand word (or so) compendium of facts sort of book that is just a bunch of short entries and not as nearly interesting as I imagined the book would be when I first saw it.

What I did learn in this book was that there have been many more hoaxes in recent years than I was aware of. Some of them I have a feeling were caught before a books publication or else so close to the release that they never ended up shipping to stores. Why? Because so many of these fake memoirs (especially about the Holocaust) would have been books in my sections and I would have been told to go pull them from the shelf when the publisher recalled them, but I don't remember doing this very often. Plagiarism I can remember, but hoaxes? Not so much.

Hoaxes occupy a hazy area. A hoax can be a joke. It can be used to throw mud on the faces of pompous windbags, like say in the Skoal hoax, it can be someone making up facts about their own life and passing it off as truth. It can be exposed and result in humiliation like in the case of James Frey, or it can be ignored

and the books can still go on to be treated as 'fictional-fact' like in say *Mutant Messages Down Under*. The hoax can be about authorial voice and when the curtained is pulled back the industry churning around the author collapses (like JT LeRoy). The hoax can be some young man forging letters by Shakespeare and selling them a Bard-gone-wild 18th century England.

When you start to look at all these examples you start to think, what exactly is a hoax? There is obviously the common thread of the person creating the work not turning out to be really the person the people buying a work expect it to be. But what about the writer of sensitive and insightful fiction who in reality is some brutal asshole, the fierce leftist political writer who is a money-grubbing bore in real life? Hoaxes? No, of course not, but aren't they projecting an image that is counter to what their real-self is?

What this book did teach me is that the world of literary hoaxes is really a kind of murky world. Some of the people in here are obviously just literary con-men (and women), but what about an author of fiction who in order to get published creates a persona. Yeah it's for money, and yeah people might be believing that an author is an uber-hipster twenty-something year old former truck-stop prostitute; but is in reality a forty year old woman. But are the fictional words she wrote any less valid than the ones supposedly written by Jerome Terminator LeRoy?

But it's not truth!!!!!

Is it meant to be?

But this book. These bite size vignettes are interesting but the majority of them just aren't that satisfying, they are too short, too brief, and sometimes just too laughably incorrect with their conjectures about what the future will hold for a hoaxers future. Not that I'm holding the authors uncanny ability of not-predicting the future against her. It's more just the genre that this book falls into. The expectations I build reading the dust-jacket of books like this matched with the reality of the books. The failure of the work to live up to expectations. The reality and truth conflicting with my belief and expectations. Hoax?

What did I really learn from this book? That Australia is a hotbed for literary hoaxes, and not all of them evil hoaxes. One of them was actually quite touching.

One last question. Is a forgery technically a hoax?

I feel like this book should have focused on just one or two types of hoaxes instead of being as almost a hodgepodge mess as this review.

Sue says

An entertaining overview of literary hoaxes. (Some surprising errors in the text e.g. Angus and Robinson publishers instead of Angus and Robertson, Ann Heiss instead of Anita Heiss.)

Kristen says

An absolutely delightful romp through the many flavors of book hoax history. Katsoulis' prose is sparkling

and charming, and her stories almost too amusing to believe...

Hanna says

First published at Booking in Heels.

Telling Tales is a collection of some of the most interesting literary hoaxes committed in the last two centuries, neatly arranged each under its own subheading and then arranged by subject, motive or century. Katsoulis explores the different types of hoax along with possible reasons or motive behind the scam.

There's a wide range of topic covered, some more interesting than others. My favourite was definitely the chapter that covered Celebrity Hoaxes, like the Hitler Diaries or the autobiography of Howard Hughes. I knew a tiny bit about both of these already, but it was great to expand my knowledge. That's the wonderful thing, I think - this book covers everything from famous hoaxes like the above to smaller, every-day scams like those fake 'misery-memoirs' you see so often on supermarket shelves.

I'm not entirely sure every single story deserved to be in here though. There's quite a lot about books written by authors under a different name or using a different photo, and I don't really see anything wrong with that. A story is a story, no matter who it's told by. As long as it's not masquerading as non-fiction, I don't see the harm. That said, I didn't realise Go Ask Alice, the coming-of-age novel about sex and drugs, was written by a middle-aged, middle-class, white woman. Considering the infamy that book has gathered, it was quite a revelation to me.

It would have been nice if the chapter groupings were a little more consistent. Some are arranged by date, some by topic and some by motive and it gets a little annoying. Either write chronologically or by topic, don't chop and change! It's not difficult!

I found it strange that there was no conclusion, bibliography or author information, but this is clearly meant to be a fun read, not an academic tome. That said, the author presupposes you already have a lot of literature-related knowledge, like the complete works of any given author. It's a strange mix, like using sock puppets to explain one concept and then explaining the next in Ancient Arabic at 400 wpm.

The information and tone of this book are great, but I do think the formatting and grouping could be improved a little. The author's leaps of faith also bothered me a tiny bit, as she kept saying the words 'no doubt that...' and 'we can assume that...' and she never cites her references. That said, it's a great read that you can either dip into or sit down and read it in a day (like I did).

Erica says

I found this very fun reading. Initially I did not like the writing style but then I managed to adapt. All these stories of enterprising (and sometimes really ludicrous) hoaxes are great reading. Sometimes it defies belief that anyone swallowed these to begin with. To be sure, a new Shakespeare find should be greeted with great joy and enthusiasm. But would you not be suspicious if you were asked to accept that the great bard wrote "unfriended, new adopted" as "unnefreynnededde newee adoppetedde"?

My favorite story is the group hoax creation of a demand for a book which did not exist (until it was written later), called "I, Libertine." A noctunal DJ and his nocturnal listeners somehow got this non-existent book onto bestseller lists, in part because the New York intellectuals seemed so ready to admire any thing on a bestseller list. The DJ and his listeners even created the back-story for the "author," a ex-British Army lieutenant named Frederick Ewing, now a civil servant in Rhodesia. Then the DJ had his listeners report follow-up:
"A few days later one woman phoned in to say that she had mentioned the book at her bridge club, and four of her fellow players claimed to have read it, three of them liking it immensely. A college student sent in a graded essay he had produced on 'F.R Ewing: Eclectic Historian': a nine-page paper with footnotes. His professor gave it a B+ and commended him on his excellent research."

The book is full of interesting stories, some just fun and some rather sordid and unfortunate. The whole story arc of the hoax, the weakening of the story, the suspicions, and then the reveal is vastly entertaining.

And just for the record, I would like everyone to know that MY copy of "The Education of Little Tree" is still in its original cellophane.

Alicia says

I couldn't decide if I should give this 3 stars or 4, but I ultimately decided on 4 because so many of the stories made me laugh out loud. The author breaks down hoaxes into several categories: Those done for monetary gain, those done for fame/attention, those done as revenge, those done just for silliness. (her categories are much more eloquent, but I summarized for you).

I didn't like how the book kind of got tedious at the end. With nearly 60 different stories sometimes you are thinking "didn't I already read this one?" But it's nice that you can pick up the book and put it down and not feel like you have to remind yourself what is going on. Each story is a few pages long, and as such they move along very quickly.

I really enjoyed this book and laughed at some of the things that people tried to get away with. It also makes me think about what books I have read out there that I thought were true but maybe were frauds! I think you will really enjoy looking into the pages of different literary schemers.

Susana says

Valía la pena aunque solo fuera para enterarse de que un profesor de Columbia en los años 60 falsificó una carta que ponía a Jesús de necrófilo pederasta gay.

Moloch says

Nel gruppo Goodreads Italia c'è un gioco chiamato "La parola del mese", in cui, appunto, ogni mese si sceglie una parola diversa e i partecipanti dovranno leggere un libro che la contenga nel titolo. Come si vede, è molto semplice e senza troppe pretese, non c'è "competizione", non c'è un vero e proprio "tema", però mi sembra che piaccia, raccoglie sempre adesioni, e sono contenta perché l'ho inventato io. Qualcuno lo

interpreta come un mezzo per scoprire autori o libri sconosciuti, scelti solo perché contengono la parola del mese e che poi, magari, entrano fra i nostri preferiti. Io attribuisco a questo gioco una funzione differente (visto che non sono una lettrice che ama andare "alla cieca"): vedo se fra i tanti libri accumulati negli anni e in attesa ce n'è uno che casualmente contiene la parola prescelta: quello è il "pretesto" per prenderlo finalmente in mano.
Ecco il motivo per cui, visto che la parola di marzo è "bugiardo", ho iniziato il mese con *Il libro dei libri bugiardi*, di Melissa Katsoulis, che possiedo dal 2010; evidentemente mi serviva proprio uno "stimolo" in più, perché ricordo di averlo iniziato anche qualche tempo fa, ma dopo poche pagine l'avevo abbandonato. Non credo perché l'avessi trovato particolarmente difficile: è un testo tutt'altro che specialistico, scritto in modo divulgativo da una giornalista, non una storica della letteratura. Probabilmente il problema sarà stato che, malgrado l'argomento stuzzicante (libri il cui contenuto si spaccia per vero, e invece è clamorosamente inventato, o scritti da autori che poi si scoprono fasulli, con intento doloso o per una semplice "burla" ai danni dei critici o dei rivali accademici), non è proprio un testo brillante, e infatti si lascia leggere, si vengono a sapere cose interessanti e/o curiose, ma di sicuro, nelle mie personali classifiche di fine anno, questo libro non si porterà a casa l'Oscar per il miglior saggio del 2014 (sarebbe insomma un classico 3/5, ma vedrete che il voto sarà leggermente inferiore per i motivi che dirò).

Il sottotitolo italiano, "L'avventura millenaria dei falsi letterari" (quello originale invece si tiene più sul vago: "A History of Literary Hoaxes"), è ingannevole: nell'introduzione vengono sì ricordati anche casi più antichi, a cominciare naturalmente dalla celeberrima Donazione di Costantino, ma il resto del libro copre un arco cronologico tutt'altro che "millenario": si parte dal XVIII secolo, e gli esempi più numerosi sono tratti dalla storia letteraria del XX e dei primi anni del XXI; inoltre, come era forse prevedibile, l'attenzione è puntata quasi esclusivamente sul panorama anglofono. Tra l'altro nell'introduzione si dice che le truffe illustrate nel libro sono "ordinate cronologicamente" (p. 10), poi in effetti non è così (a parte i primi due capitoli su XVIII e XIX secolo), sono disposte per argomento: mah.

A parte il primo capitolo sul Settecento, che in gran parte tratta argomenti già visti recentemente (e trattati in modo più ampio) in *The Great Shakespeare Fraud* (non potevano infatti certamente mancare gli esempi di James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton e William-Henry Ireland), il resto del libro è una carrellata tra casi assai celebri, come i *Protocolli dei savi anziani di Sion* o i falsi diari di Hitler o (in anni recentissimi) l'inesistente J.T. LeRoy, e altri meno noti (almeno a me, o al pubblico italiano) e bizzarri, che oscillano fra la truffa a volte "geniale" e divertente, gustosa e ben architettata, l'inganno spregevole e il "caso umano", il bugiardo patologico in cerca di attenzione (un indice dei nomi e delle opere sarebbe stato utile). Alla lunga però il tutto si riduce a una compilazione un po' monotona e arida di casi che per la maggior parte finiscono per assomigliarsi (l'autore si finge quel che non è – viene creduto – il libro ha successo – si scopre la truffa/l'inganno/lo scherzo).

Ecco un po' di libri di successo che sono in realtà truffe belle e buone o, nel migliore dei casi, raffinati scherzi letterari (Gary): ... *E venne chiamata Due Cuori* di Marlo Morgan, presunte avventure di una donna in viaggio assieme a una tribù di aborigeni australiani, che fece infuriare i suddetti per le sue falsità, *L'amore ucciso* , di Norma Khouri, che, uscito nel 2002, sfruttò il clima post-11 settembre per raccontare di un presunto "delitto d'onore" in Giordania, *Sopravvivere coi lupi* , di Misha Defonseca, in cui l'autrice vuol far credere di essere sfuggita bambina ai nazisti ed essere vissuta a lungo nelle foreste con un branco di lupi, anche un libro che vorrei leggere, *La vita davanti a sé* , che, se oggi appare con in copertina il nome del vero autore, Romain Gary, in origine era creduto opera dell'inesistente Emile Ajar. Mi sono divertita a verificare su Goodreads se effettivamente la comunità dei lettori ne è al corrente: altri titoli si possono trovare qui. Inutile dire che il genere in cui questi esempi più abbondano è quello del *misery memoir*, "storie vere" strappalacrime di presunte ex vittime della droga o dell'alcolismo, ma non manca neppure chi si costruisce un passato da sopravvissuto alla Shoah (e questo aspetto si può ricollegare a un libro adocchiato tempo fa

che sembrava interessante, sul "business" dell'Olocausto... Forse questo? Ma io pensavo a un saggio, quello è un romanzo). Era forse un po' troppo aspettarsi che l'autrice fosse informata sugli esempi del panorama italiano (penso alle recenti controversie attorno ai nomi di Lara Manni e Nicolai Lilin).

Nel libro è ricordato solo di sfuggita (p. 347) uno spassoso e recente caso di "burla" letteraria, e cioè *Atlanta Nights* , che invece, rispetto ai tanti altri esempi, aveva più di un elemento di originalità (a cominciare dal carattere di "sfida" lanciata all'editoria a pagamento): mi colpì talmente tanto che quella voce su Wikipedia in italiano la tradussi io dall'inglese.

Desta qualche perplessità la traduzione italiana: non che mi sembri sbagliata, ma ogni tanto c'è qualche sbavatura (o qualche frase che sembra tradotta troppo letteralmente, p. 346). Ad es., a p. 29 nel testo c'è un'interpolazione chiaramente pensata per l'edizione italiana e non originale (si parla dell'opera di Macpherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*, "da noi più noti come *Poesie di Ossian*, grazie alla traduzione che ne fece Melchiorre Cesarotti"), non è segnalata e poteva anche essere messa in nota, piuttosto che nel corpo del testo. A p. 66 c'è la bizzarra scelta di lasciare il nome di un quotidiano russo e il titolo di un'opera, ugualmente pubblicata per la prima volta in russo, in inglese (cioè così come deve averli scritti Katsoulis, ma che senso ha mantenerli anche nella traduzione italiana, se comunque non sono quelli originali? Allora meglio mettere quelli russi). A p. 119 si parla delle false lettere della prima fidanzata di Lincoln al futuro presidente: invece di riprodurre il testo "originale" in inglese sgrammaticato, c'è... la versione italiana "creativa" ("in italiano suonerebbero più o meno così": ma chi lo dice?), con un po' di errori a caso ("il mio quore corre per la felicita..."): di nuovo, che senso ha? Curiosamente, lasciare il testo originale facendolo seguire dalla traduzione è proprio il metodo utilizzato più avanti (e per fortuna) quando si tratta di versi (pp. 152-154, 249, 251, 255, 257, 262, 324), ma non solo, anche per un'altra lettera in cui il testo inglese è significativo ai fini del discorso (p. 362): e allora perché qui sì e lì no?

Capitolo "errori vari". A p. 107 si legge di un "ex campione di box" (invece che *boxe*), a p. 114 l'articolo che smaschera questa truffa viene datato 1996, il che è impossibile, infatti è del 2006; già alla pagina dopo (115) è riportata questa dichiarazione dello scrittore smascherato: "*Quello solo in quello a cui volete credere*" (sic). Eh? La frase originale (lo scopro sempre da Wikipedia) era "What you want to believe you want to believe", quindi, più o meno, "si crede in quello cui si vuole credere". A p. 157 si fa confusione con i nomi: la frase "Malley riuscì comunque a diventare una figura molto amata nella sua città" andrebbe corretta in "*Harris* riuscì comunque a diventare una figura molto amata nella sua città". Più una marea di altri errori sparsi qua e là, parole che mancano, frasi che in italiano suonano un po' sgraziate (pp. 121, 161, 232, 250, 254, 289, 292...), indice di scarsa cura.

Insomma, sembra che nessuno alla Rizzoli si sia preso il disturbo di rileggere questo libro prima di pubblicarlo.

2,5/5

http://moloch981.wordpress.com/2014/0...

Hannah says

Telling Tales wasn't a very enjoyable book. I read it start to finish, but I think its format is best suited to coffee table or bathroom browsing. Melissa Katsoulis's writing style isn't very enjoyable to read, and her

explanations of various literary hoaxes are quite smug and judgmental. It is also littered with spelling and grammatical errors which were very distracting and annoying.

One of my biggest problems with the book was her claim that more hoaxers have come out of Australia than actual literary talent. She lists six hoaxes; is she really implying that there are fewer than six accomplished Australian writers? This ticked me off and put me in a bad mood for the rest of the book.

There were very few hoaxes that I wasn't already familiar with, and the details, which I would have been most interested in, were scarce and poorly selected.

T Campbell says

Three stars feels a bit generous. The material that makes up the book is fascinating, and Katsoulis has done an admirable job of collecting hoaxes from very early days to relatively recent times.

The writing, though, is unsophisticated, and the effect of somewhat clunky paragraphs is made worse by packing them too closely together. The biggest problem, though, is one that Katsoulis couldn't have anticipated: in the age of actually fake news and real news being called "fake news," it's hard to take quite the disinterested attitude toward hoaxes that she does in 2009. I was looking for more of a range of the emotions and issues that such hoaxes produce and, well, that's not to be found here: even when the book talks about how upset Mencken was at the effects of his own "bathtub" hoax or the "shocking" example of "Holocaust pretenders" (claiming to be part of the Holocaust when you weren't isn't as shocking as denying it existed, and the latter's far more of an issue now), the tone is mostly a wry "Oh, well!"

Despite these flaws, though, it's a good academic roundup of its subject matter. If you're already interested in the subject, this book will be fine. It just could have been much better.
