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Telling Tales: A History of Literary Hoaxes

Melissa Katsoulis

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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...

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