



# **Sins against Science: The Scientific Media Hoaxes of Poe, Twain, and Others (SUNY series, Studies in Scientific and Technical Communication)**

*Lynda Walsh*

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*Recounts the fake news stories, written from 1830 to 1880, about scientific and technological discoveries, and the effect these hoaxes had on readers and their trust in science.*

Lynda Walsh explores a provocative era in American history—the proliferation of fake news stories about scientific and technological discoveries from 1830 to 1880. These hoaxes, which fooled thousands of readers, offer a first-hand look at an intriguing guerilla tactic in the historical struggle between arts and sciences in America. Focusing on the hoaxes of Richard Adams Locke, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and Dan De Quille, the author combines rhetorical hermeneutics, linguistic pragmatics, and reader-response theory to answer three primary questions: How did the hoaxes work? What were the hoaxers trying to accomplish? And—what is a hoax?

“Its careful examination of contemporary reader reactions to the hoaxes provides concrete evidence for what people actually believed—thus attesting very specifically to the nineteenth-century ‘assumptions about the real world’ that were being ‘called into question’ by the hoaxes ... impressively wide range of historical and theoretical resources are brought to bear on these ‘acts of reading.’ All of this is woven into a rich and nuanced account of what we stand to gain—in terms of understanding the past—by taking seriously a handful of little known jests.” — *The Edgar Allen Poe Review*

“I found the book to be quite informative, not only as a technical exploration concerned with how readers interact with texts that promulgate hoaxes, but also as a work providing helpful glimpses of the emerging roles of science and media in this period.” — Thomas M. Lessl, The University of Georgia

“As Walsh points out, there is no extended analysis of hoaxes in the rhetoric of science, and her book shows how important hoaxes are in understanding the history of professionalized science as it emerged in the United States. The relationship of science and the the public is of utmost importance in science studies, and the author has identified a key source of historical information about this relationship.” — Ellen Barton, coeditor of *Discourse Studies in Composition*

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