

IF PINOCCHIO HAD GOTTEN A NOSE JOB instead of telling the truth, it would have changed his whole life story. Some current memoirists and their publishers have taken this thought to heart. Their revised version of what constitutes truth is as plain as the nose jobs on their faces. Their dubious memoirs are artificially pumped up from A cups to double-D's, the life struggles they describe tightened here, fattened there, all done in order to appear more shocking, more attractive, more titillating to the reader.

Literary makeovers work. Many of these "memoirs" are bombshell best-sellers.

And why not? Current culture lauds makeovers. We can't get enough of "The Swan," "Queer Eye," "What Not to Wear," and "Tim Gunn's Guide to Style." We don't applaud the homely soul who remains true to their less-than-ideal appearance. We demand total, extreme transformation; the bigger the changes we see in the "afters" the more astounded and entertained we are by them, even if the people no longer resemble themselves, or any normal human being.

Oprah has hosted more than her fair share of makeover shows, and the afters always garner robust applause from her devoted audience. So why should this same audience be outraged when James Frey's Oprah-endorsed *A Million Little Pieces* or Herman Rosenblat's *Angel at the Fence* turn out to be literary afters? If Oprah and her devotees laud changing people's outward appearances, why such outrage over the altered, or even invented, personal memoir?

Enter Augusten Xon Burroughs, born Christopher Richter Robison, who still maintains his best selling *Running with Scissors* is all true, despite the undisclosed amounts of money he paid to quiet the lawsuits filed by members of the psychiatrist's family featured in his book, who accused him of exaggeration and fabrication. More recently, his account of events in *A Wolf at the Table: A Memoir of My Father* are at odds with his own brother John's earlier memoir. But, is anyone really surprised? And, should we finger-wag or applaud?

"You know, memoir is not court stenography," Augusten argued to CBS's Erin Moriarty. "Memoir is not a video on YouTube. Memoir has a narrative. Memoirs, a good memoir, is a person's experience, their memory, and how that experience mattered to them, emotionally and psychologically."

Herman Rosenblat goes even further. "It wasn't a lie," he explained, on ABC's Good Morning America, "It was my imagination. And in my imagination, in my mind, I believed it."

Perhaps he did, but the difference lost on Rosenblat, Burroughs, and their ilk is that in literature, there already exists a perfectly suitable genre for what they wrote: fiction. Sure, we wouldn't tell someone who has had rhinoplasty that they now have a "fictional" nose. Although it is not the nose they were born with, it is still their real nose. But altering one's memoir is more akin to wearing a rubber one. It doesn't change its author's actual history; it merely hides it behind a fabricated version. Their true past still remains, unaltered and unalterable, waiting for someone to expose it. And just as honesty earned a puppet the

right to be a real boy, so it must also be for writers who call themselves memoirists.



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