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## Burdens of Proof: Faith, Doubt, and Identity in Autobiography

Susanna Egan

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In this compelling study of the representation and reception of fraudulent identities, Susanna Egan offers a subtle and intelligent reading of the ways in which histories of faith and doubt inform autobiographical practices. Tracing the problematics of ascription, plagiarism, ghosting, invention, or theft in different historical and political climates and across a variety of material cultures, *Burdens of Proof* provocatively asks readers to extend autobiography's claims to self and truth to themselves. Egan's enthusiasm for her topic is contagious and, as usual, masterfully complemented with an acute understanding of the workings of autobiography as well as its very real impact on our lives.

– Nancy Pedri, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Autobiographical impostures, once they come to light, appear to us as outrageous, scandalous. They confuse lived and textual identity (the person in the world and the character in the text) and call into question what we believe, what we doubt, and how we receive information. In the process, they tell us a lot about cultural norms and anxieties. *Burdens of Proof* examines a broad range of impostures in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and asks about each one: Why this particular imposture? Why here and now?

Susanna Egan's historical survey of texts from early Christendom to the nineteenth century provides an understanding of the author in relation to the text and shows how plagiarism and other false claims have not always been regarded as the frauds we consider them today. She then explores the role of the media in the creation of much contemporary imposture, examining in particular the cases of Jumana Hanna, Norma Khouri, and James Frey. The book also addresses ethnic imposture, deliberate fictions, plagiarism, and ghostwriting, all of which raise moral, legal, historical, and cultural issues. Egan concludes the volume with an examination of how historiography and law failed to support the identities of European Jews during World War II, creating sufficient instability in Jewish identity and doubt about Jewish wartime experience that the impostor could step in. This textual erasure of the Jews of Europe and the refashioning of their experiences in fraudulent texts are examples of imposture as an outcrop of extreme identity crisis.

The first to examine these issues in North America and Europe, *Burdens of Proof* will be of interest to scholars of life writing and cultural studies.

**Susanna Egan** is recently retired from the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. She has written extensively on autobiography and published two monographs: *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (1980) and *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (2000). Her insecurities about knowledge having increased over the years, she can no longer distinguish between faith and doubt.

\*originally announced as hardcover

Susanna Egan



### Burdens of Proof

Faith, Doubt, and Identity in Autobiography

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