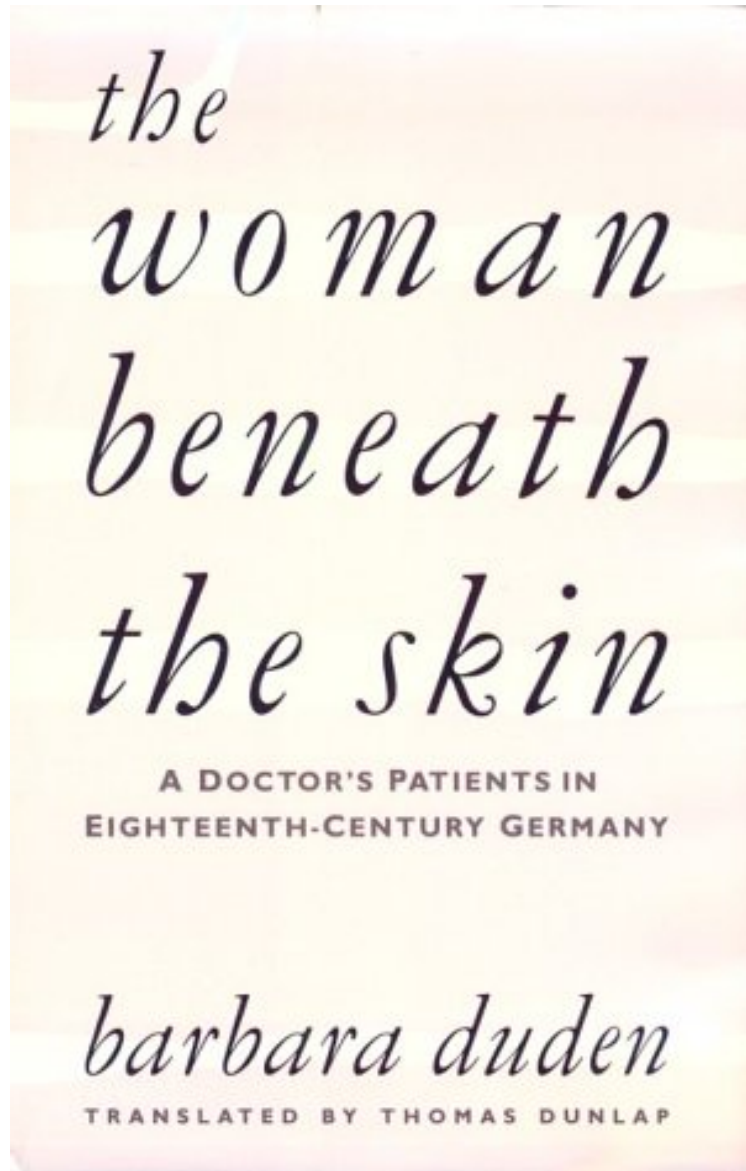


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## The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany

Barbara Duden

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**Barbara Duden : The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Fascinating Look at Eighteenth Century Medicine and Its

ImplicationsBy RDDIn *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctors Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, Barbara Duden examines the records of Dr. Johannes Pelargius Storch to discover how Dr. Storch and his female patients each conceived of the female body and, through their interactions with each other, defined the nature and limits of that body. Dudens work, like much of what weve read so far, relies heavily on Foucault and the construction of and competition between discourses. Duden writes, It was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that the modern body was created as the effect and object of medical examination. It was newly created as an object that could be abused, transformed, and subjugated. According to Foucault, this passivity of the object was the result of the ritual of clinical examination (pg. 3). At the same time that doctors created the body as an object of clinical examination, they described disease as something based in a persons entire lived experience. Duden writes, Disease was to be seen as a mental and psychic disturbance of the relation to ones environment and fellow human beings. Writing at a high literary level and in the hope of reforming the practice of medicine, these men [Viktor von Weizscker, V.E. von Gebattel, and others] focused their attention on the doctors relation to the individual life story (pg. 43). These stories as Storch recorded them serve as the basis of Dudens argument. Dudens description of doctors place in society serves to set up her argument for the conflicting discourses of womens bodies. According to Duden, The lack of uniformity in training is important, since it tells us something about the conditions that shaped a persons self-image, about the tensions between the academic self-image and a craftlike, practical competence (pg. 54). This struggle played out in Storchs interaction with his patients. Patients brought their complaints to the doctor, who diagnosed their ailments based on patient histories, and prescribed something to treat pain (pg. 154). Often, the patients requested specific treatments, giving them a degree of control over their treatment. Duden writes, The women always had the last word. The judged the merits of the prescription and did so solely in accord with their own experiences" (pg. 156). Eighteenth century medicine conceived of gender and sex in manner that contradicts modern understandings. Duden writes, Many of the manifestations that we clearly perceive as sex characteristics, were in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries not unequivocal signs for the difference between man and womanThe eye of culture sees in the order of nature what it expects to see (pg. 116). To this end, doctors expected both men and women to bleed, though from different areas and at different intervals. Interestingly, Dudens discussion contradicts Kuriyamas claim that Western medicine avoids metaphor. Duden writes of the ability to describe pain, The language of pain conveys an entire world view. As long as there was no classificatory landscape of the inner processes of the body, the pain that was to be described, which lurked invisible inside the body and could not be grasped objectively, had to be expressed in relation to a third phenomenon (pg. 89). Further, a metaphoric language reveals layers of perception precisely through its mediated structure, since it can speak only in a contextual relation (pg. 89). Dudens analysis of Storchs records offers insight into the changing nature of medicine in the eighteenth century.

Despite historians' interest in cultural representations of the body, we tend to think of human anatomy and physiology as scientific fact, not historical artifact. In this study Barbara Duden asserts that the most basic biological and medical terms that we use to describe our own bodies - male or female, healthy or sick - are indeed cultural constructions. She sets out to cross the traditional boundary between history and nature by gaining access to the inner existence of a group of women who lived in bodies very different from our own. These women were the patients of Johann Storch, a physician who lived and worked in the town of Eisenach, Germany, during the first half of the 18th century. Storch meticulously documented the medical histories of approximately 1800 women of all ages and social stations, often in their own words. This rich and unique record of complaints, symptoms, diagnoses, and treatments reveals an alien understanding of the female body and its function. Physical processes - digestion, menstruation, pregnancy - were not associated with discrete internal organs. Blood ebbed and flowed rather than circulated; pregnancy did not exist until quickening; menses could be discharged in the form of tears. Physical examination was not necessary to medical care, and in many cases the doctor had no direct contact with his patient. Barbara Duden uses his material to reanimates the female body that Johann Storch treated and that his patients inhabited, showing that its structure, function and meaning - and therefore those of our own bodies - belong to history as well as to nature.

Duden splendidly succeeds in recreating this submerged and secret world of female consciousness, and the ambiguous role of the physician in maintaining it. An important milestone. --Roy Porter (Wellcome Institute, London)While modern readers may be initially alienated by the way in which phenomena cited in Duden's profuse quotations from [Dr. Johannes Pelargius] Storch's journals conflict with contemporary 'certainties' about the body...her approach ultimately makes the desired point: the culturally contingent 'boundary that separates the body, and especially the body beneath the skin, from the world around it' likewise conditions contemporary understandings, not only of what is known about our bodies but also about how people in other times and places have 'imagined' their bodies. --Patricia Herminghouse (Signs)Language NotesText: English (translation) Original Language: GermanAbout the AuthorBarbara Duden has been on the faculty of the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Pennsylvania State University and is currently a Fellow at the Institute for Cultural Studies, Essen, Germany.