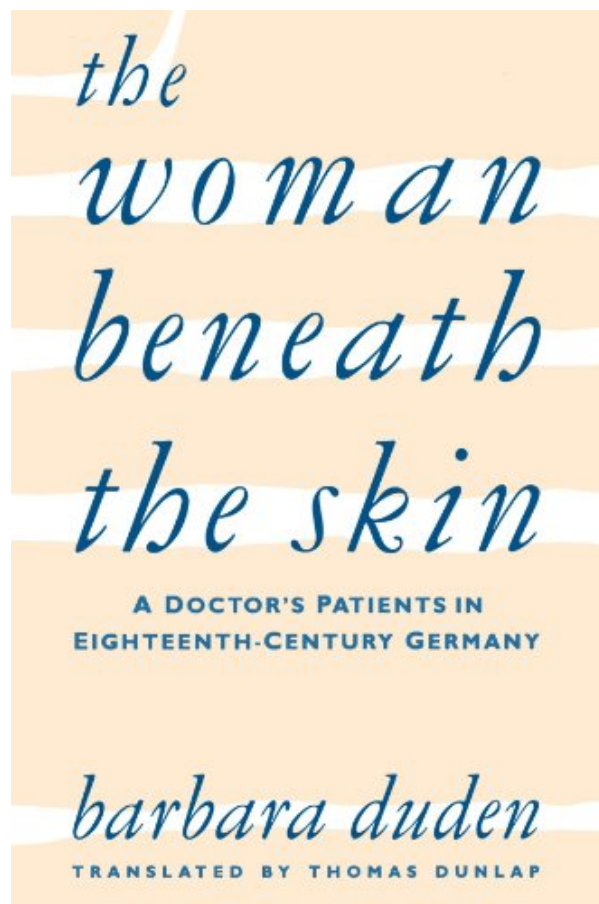


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DOCTOR'S PATIENTS IN EIGHTEENTH-  
CENTURY GERMANY BY BARBARA DUDEN**



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*the  
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A DOCTOR'S PATIENTS IN  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

*barbara duden*

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS DUNLAP

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## Review

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 Pelargiusi] 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 Herminhouse Signs)

## Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

Original Language: German

## About the Author

Barbara 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.

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In this provocative study, Barbara Duden asserts that the most basic biological and medical terms that we use to describe our own bodies--male and female, healthy or sick--are indeed cultural constructions. To illustrate this, Duden delves into the records of an eighteenth-century German physician who meticulously documented the medical histories of eighteen hundred women of all ages and backgrounds, often in their own words.

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A Fascinating Look at Eighteenth Century Medicine and Its Implications

By RDD

In *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's 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. Duden's work, like much of what we've 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 person's entire lived experience. Duden writes, "Disease was to be seen as a mental and psychic disturbance of the relation to one's 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 Weizsäcker, V.E. von Gebattel, and others] focused their attention on the doctor's relation to the individual life story" (pg. 43). These stories as Storch recorded them serve as the basis of Duden's argument.

Duden's description of doctors' place in society serves to set up her argument for the conflicting discourses of women's bodies. According to Duden, "The lack of uniformity in training is important, since it tells us something about the conditions that shaped a person's self-image, about the tensions between the academic self-image and a craftlike, practical competence" (pg. 54). This struggle played out in Storch's 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. They 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 a 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 woman...The 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, Duden's discussion contradicts Kuriyama's 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). Duden's analysis of Storch's records offers insight into the changing nature of medicine in the eighteenth century.

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