

Editor's Note

One day last August, I got a frenzied call from an old college friend, a staff psychiatrist at Y___ Hospital. It seemed he was casting about for a medical publisher willing to accept, sight unseen, an as-yet-unwritten manuscript. The prospective author?: an anonymous patient of dubious standing, whose involvement depended on an iron-clad promise of publication. Well, in the interest of decency I proceeded to hear him out, signalling my secretary to interrupt me in ten. Needless to say, within those ten minutes he and I had conspired to make medical history.

The book you are holding is an unprecedented creation: the minutely recorded oral history of a patient believed to have a syndrome of fearful fakery. Though all doctors have contended with this syndrome from time to time, never before has it permitted such microscopic examination.

My friend and I initially conceived the project as a series of transcribed psychotherapeutic sessions, and for purposes of impartiality he delegated a junior colleague to perform as therapist. This young psychiatrist, despite earnest and repeated efforts to engage the patient, found herself progressively relegated to the role of mere transcriptionist. Her intense and subtle work throughout the sessions will be easily inferred by the attentive reader and deserves full acknowledgment here. We gratefully append the objective Intake Report of her single face-to-face encounter with the patient, which immediately precedes the onset of the oral history.

Since the patient evaded subsequent direct encounters with the therapist, preferring to speak across a visual barrier, we found ourselves devoid of clinical commentary with which to shape this otherwise free-wheeling narrative. Therefore, we have adopted a somewhat bold alternative.

You will find interspersed among the chapters of this patient's oral history certain other chapters from a manuscript sent to this publishing house through an antiquarian's bequest many years ago. The yellowed, archaic packet had been considered unpublishable by all previous editors. However, because it happened to fall in the same titular file as our patient's story, we curiously reread it and began to discover some odd, unexpected compatibilities. Hearing echoes across the gulf of time and temperament, we decided to include within the covers of our contemporary case report the reflections of an eighteenth-century German nobleman.

Having thus stirred up a psycho-literary stew, we decided to add one further element to the mix: a series of case-related documents that may offer the poor bewildered reader some sequential outline to hang his hat on.

Like as not, this triple-stranded narrative will generate more ire than illumination. I can only plead in our defense the infectious eccentricity of our subject. Without further ado, I turn you over to the measured observations of the young psychiatrist in her preliminary meeting with the patient.