



Sybil Exposed: The Extraordinary Story Behind the Famous Multiple Personality Case

By Debbie Nathan



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Now available in paperback, *Sybil Exposed* is the *New York Times* bestselling book that offers a new perspective on the smash hit book and film, *Sybil*, and on multiple personality disorder itself.

Sybil: a name that resonates with legions of obsessed fans who followed the nonfiction blockbuster from 1973. The book rocketed multiple personality disorder into public consciousness and played a major role in having the diagnosis added to the psychiatric bible, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. But what do we really know about how Sybil came to be? In her news-breaking book *Sybil Exposed*, journalist Debbie Nathan gives proof that the allegedly true story outlined in the megabestseller was largely fabricated. The actual identity of Sybil (Shirley Mason) has been available for some years, as has the idea that the book might have been exaggerated. But Nathan reveals the trio of women behind the legend: the willing patient, her ambitious shrink, and the imaginative journalist who spun their story into bestseller gold.

Sybil Exposed draws from an enormous trail of papers, records, photos, and tapes to unearth the lives and passions of these three women whose story exploded into an epic movement with consequences beyond their wildest dreams. Set across the twentieth century and rooted in a time when few professional roles were available to women, this is a story of corrosive sexism, bold but unchecked ambition, runaway greed, utter human vulnerability, duplicity and shared delusion, shaky theories of psychoanalysis exuberantly and drastically practiced, and how one modest young woman's life turned psychiatry on its head and radically changed the course of therapy—and our culture, as well.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this startling expose...Nathan serves up a tale just as shocking as the famed original."--"Publisher's Weekly", starred review

"Debbie Nathan's fine, insistent mind will stop at nothing to get to the truth behind Sybil, no how many walls are put up-- Her research is beyond compare". "" --Susie Bright, author of "Big Sex Little Death"

"I've long considered Debbie Nathan to be the most important and unsung writer working in America today. "Sybil Exposed" affirms her brilliance. Using a fierce blend of investigative journalism and cultural criticism, she exposes multiple personality disorder as yet another lurid myth cooked up by the collective unconscious of our popular culture. The book is an astonishing achievement." -- Steve Almond, author of "Candyfreak" and "God Bless America"

"Debbie Nathan's "Sybil Exposed" is a first-rate historical detective story recreating the lives of the three protagonists of one of the most popular accounts of a psychiatric patient in American history. The sixteen personalities ascribed to "Sybil" set the medical and legal tone for discussions of the 'epidemic' of child abuse at the end of the 20th century as well as the psychological damage done to its survivors. Nathan shows how the subject of the study, her psychiatrist, as well as the author of the book invented a biography to explain something that never existed: the multiple personalities of the patient as well as their cause. Any reader captivated by our contemporary "first-hand" accounts of mental illness, should read this account that illustrates how the demands of the readers at any historical moment shape such accounts and make them seem truer than true." --Sander L. Gilman, author of SEEING THE INSANE Distinguished Professor of the Liberal Arts and Sciences; Professor of

"A compelling account of the creation, packaging, and selling of this case of medical and journalistic malpractice." --"Science"

"A massive undertaking of research that teases apart fact from fiction to reveal an even more interesting and educational account..."Sybil" remains a good book and movie, but perhaps Nathan's version of the story is the one worth telling in classrooms. " --"New Scientist"

"What forces cause a diagnosis like Multiple Personality Disorder to rise and fall within less than a generation? Debbie Nathan broke the story 20 years ago and now, in "Sybil Exposed", she's finally putting all the puzzle pieces together. Unless we learn the lessons in this journalistic masterwork, we are doomed to fall victim to the next fad and the next caring healer who claims to have our best interest at heart." -Ethan Watters, author of "Crazy Like Us"

"In this dazzling expose of a manipulative psychiatrist, an author who'd do anything for fame and a vulnerable girl caught in the middle, journalist Nathan reveals how these three women changed the psychiatric landscape by raising questions of identity that resonated with a generation. The result is a cautionary tale about the ways in which science, in the wrong hands, can capitalize on our collective fears. " --"More" magazine

"Throughout "Sybil Exposed", Nathan traces the winding path from truth to falsehood"--Salon

"A gripping history of crackpot psychiatry" --"People" magazine

"The true story of "Sybil" has found its ideal historian in Debbie Nathan...This is the book that should be a made-for-TV movie." --"The Wall Street Journal"

"Journalist Debbie Nathan -- whose investigative exposure of day care worker Kelly Michaels's wrongful conviction for child molestation did so much to unearth the witch hunts among us -- has found a delicious, hiding-in-plain-sight historical saga to tell: the making of the most famous "multiple personality" case and book. A troubled, impressionable young girl from a Sinclair Lewis-type small town; a brilliant, bullying, female neuropsychiatrist in 1950s Manhattan; and a glamorous, frustrated feminist magazine writer who'd had an affair with Eugene O'Neill Jr.: how these three disparate American women's fates, fantasies, and ambitions came together to create a fiction that rocked the culture and continues to affect us today makes compelling and sobering reading. Who knew this true story existed?! It's as compulsively readable as it is cautionary -- two traits rarely shared in one book."-- Sheila Weller, award winning magazine journalist and author of the "New York Times" bestseller "Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon--and the Journey of a Generation"

About the Author

Debbie Nathan has been a journalist, editor, and translator for almost three decades. Debbie's work has won numerous national and regional awards, including: The H.L. Mencken Award for Investigative Journalism, PEN West Award for Journalism, the Texas Institute of Letters Award for feature journalism, and the John Bartlow Martin Award for Public Service Journalism.

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