

Ladies and Gentlemen—but most of all Ladies—allow me to introduce myself: Dr. Humphrey Humdinger. Now, at this introduction there are bound to be shrewd or skeptical persons who are frowning and shaking their heads, suspecting that no one could possibly have such a name. And of course they are right. The name is indeed pseudonymous, an invention of mine to disguise my identity. On the other hand it is true that I am a doctor, though not the kind it takes real brains and dogged dedication to become; that is to say, not a *medical* doctor. Instead I have a Ph.D. in mathematics from the City University of New York, in which institution I also have a tenured professorship. I wouldn't have felt it necessary to hide my identity were it not for certain disagreements between myself and the police, as well as those between myself and my colleagues. In both cases the points of contention are of a philosophical-aesthetic nature. Insofar as they relate to the police it is unfortunate that they exist at all, for I have always had the utmost respect for them as upholders of the law. Unfortunately there are certain inconsistencies between the letter and the spirit of the law with regard to myself—but more about that later.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the first thing you should know is that what I do has nothing to do with the

common notion of a “flasher.” That very word makes me cringe; it is a vulgar word for a vulgar act. It denotes nothing more than some twisted half-wit popping out in front of some old lady, showing his sad self, then running off with a diabolical shriek. Such behavior serves no socially redeeming purpose and the people who do it should be locked away. True, the word “flasher” is implied in the title of these *Confessions*, but only out of begrudging deference to what is, as of this writing, the public’s ignorance about “Dramatic Exposure,” which is the proper term for what I do. I mention this at the outset because the reader who is looking for a little dirty thrill had better look elsewhere—perhaps some tawdry Internet site. From those twisted absurdities the world of dramatic exposure is a universe away and on an infinitely higher level. It has little to do with starts and screams (though there are plenty of starts and screams in it) and almost everything to do with the flexible use of language, the graceful development of body language, the—as it were—subtle manipulation of the lights and shades of personal interaction in order to evoke a specific atmosphere and emotional response; in short, it is nothing less than a dramatic art in one of its highest manifestations, and which vies with the best in theater and cinema.

Oh, to have talent! It isn’t the blessing everyone thinks it is. Even a mediocre talent signifies a divergence from the herd. But a large and original talent? One might as well have been born into a different species altogether! Moreover the works of art produced by such a talent are invariably misunderstood

because they are disconnected from the precedent forms to which the public has become accustomed. They are like a newly-discovered language no one understands and whose mysteries only rare perceptive spirits perceive the possible importance of and are willing to make the effort to untangle. And yet originality in art is where the real magic and majesty lies, even if, as history shows us, it is sometimes met with a less than positive response. My art has aroused a lot of hostility precisely because it is so groundbreaking; in the same way that *The Rite of Spring*, at its premiere, made the audience riot, and Gauguin's first paintings made the critics sneer. And where originality does not evoke hostility it is, as one might say, hostilely ignored. In the arts publicity counts for a great deal: with it, mediocrity can rise to public acclaim while without it even the most talented will struggle to make their way. This is especially the case in the acting world where ambition does not scruple to the most degraded behavior for the sake of the smallest advantage, and where consequently backstabbing and character assassination are the order of the day. It is no coincidence that those who have said the nastiest things about me—who have tried to vilify me at every turn—have been other actors. I will deal with them a little later, but for now let me just say this: when any two-bit ham can climb on a stage, strut back and forth like a turkey cock, ranting and raving, and mowing and gesticulating like a madman, and then be hailed as a “fine dramatic actor”—is it any wonder that when a real actor

comes along with his subtler, genuinely fine talent, his new, inimitable way of doing things, and even presents to the world a whole new art form;—is it any wonder that the hacks, at once perceiving that beside his their own efforts are bound to appear inconsiderable, do and say everything possible to bring him down, or, better yet, enter into a conspiracy of silence by which his name shall not be mentioned, his work remain unexplored, and thereby ensure that only their stale and uninventive productions continue to dupe the public?

The Greek philosopher Heracleitus tells us that a man's character is his destiny. Everything someone is ever to be is already there in him as a child. Thus the crafty little boy grows up into a scheming dead-beat, or a cheating corporate executive. If he is a chronic liar he will probably turn into a lawyer or a politician. And if he is interested in biology and has a proclivity to extortion?—he's sure to wind up, in America, a doctor. As for the tot charmingly good and without any obvious or great personality flaws, he will probably grow into a dutiful son, an upstanding member of the community, a cheery, good-natured fellow and worker, liked and respected by all, who just makes his living from year to year, raises a family, and passes away in his eighth or ninth decade, surrounded by sorrowing relatives. But there is another kind of child, very different from all the foregoing. He is the little performer who unabashedly sings and dances for the applause of adoring parents and aunts and uncles. Nothing pleases him more than to show off his little leaps or pirouettes, or to act out a scene

from a movie or a television show, or to declaim some speech from a play he has read. His proud parents will trot him out before company to repeat his performances, which he does with gusto, eager to win more of the adoration on which he thrives. Such a child is a born actor, and that was the case with me. Even as a boy of seven or eight I loved to perform and was proud of the satisfaction I gave in that way. "What a good little actor he is!" people said. My parents often told me I was sure to wind up a movie star in Hollywood, and I intended to be just that.

Where did my acting talent come from? I myself am a loss to account for it. I look to my father's side of the family, then shift my retrospect to my mother's, and so far as I can see there is nothing in either direction but a wasteland of inartistic mediocrity, the common and appalling spectacle of every generation striving for the same foolish things that motivated and wore out its forbears. Which is not to say they were bad people; on the contrary, they were good people—honest, hard-working, careful of their children's welfare; but they knew and cared no more about art than they did about the composition of Saturn's rings. Working toward anything other than buying a bigger house or a newer car never crossed their minds. My appearance among them as a creative person was one of those mysteries of genetics in which two indifferent lines combine to form something far beyond either one. It is said that the apple never falls far from the tree, but in my case a genetic storm carried the apple so far from the tree that none could say which one in

the orchard it came from.

But as so often happens with children, in getting older I became a lot more self-conscious and was no longer so eager to perform. My gangling adolescent limbs, my cracking voice, and the pimples on my face made me embarrassingly aware of my own physical awkwardness. But most telling of all was that certain hormones were causing me to think about other things than acting. Who cared about assuming a character, learning a new speech, and impressing my parents or their friends with a monologue from a movie or a play when two rows away from me in Social Studies class was Judy!—Judy who was so pretty, whose lips were so lusciously puckered, who wore such tight jeans! Every time she looked over to me I wanted to wobble my tongue at her;—though, of course, I had sense enough to restrain myself. At any rate, Judy, and a succession of pretty girls like her, so filled my head that acting was the last thing I thought about.

And yet the creative urge was still there. In those school years it manifested itself in the staid arts of writing, painting, or learning guitar and composing music. My efforts in these ways were not very good; they couldn't have been because they were inconsistent with the essentially dramatic nature of my personality; they were just stopgaps and makeshifts to appease an impulse whose proper mode of expression was in a very different field. It seems to me now that the hours I spent working at them was just so much wasted time, so much effort doomed to failure and, worst of all, a diversion from my true vocation.