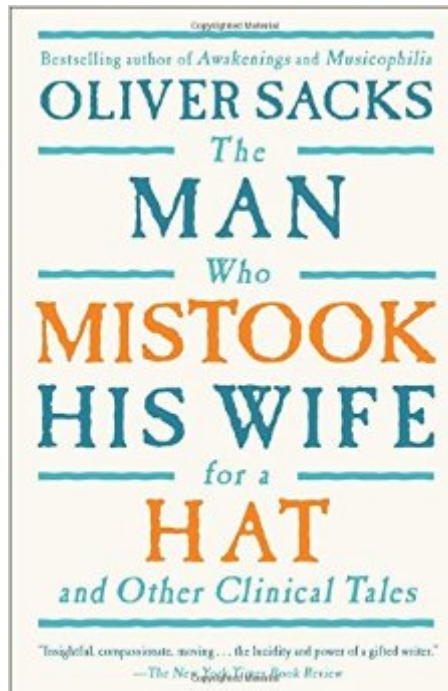


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The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat: And Other Clinical Tales



Synopsis

In his most extraordinary book, a volume of the great clinical writers of the twentieth century • (>) recounts the case histories of patients lost in the bizarre, apparently inescapable world of neurological disorders. Oliver Sacks's > tells the stories of individuals afflicted with fantastic perceptual and intellectual aberrations: patients who have lost their memories and with them the greater part of their pasts; who are no longer able to recognize people and common objects; who are stricken with violent tics and grimaces or who shout involuntary obscenities; whose limbs have become alien; who have been dismissed as retarded yet are gifted with uncanny artistic or mathematical talents. If inconceivably strange, these brilliant tales remain, in Dr. Sacks's > splendid and sympathetic telling, deeply human. They are studies of life struggling against incredible adversity, and they enable us to enter the world of the neurologically impaired, to imagine with our hearts what it must be to live and feel as they do. A great healer, Sacks never loses sight of medicine's ultimate responsibility: to the suffering, afflicted, fighting human subject. •

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is utterly fascinating to know that, as a result of a neurological condition, a man can actually mistake his wife for a hat and not realize it. It is also fascinating to learn that a stroke can leave a person with the inability to see things on one side of the visual field--which is what happened to "Mrs. S." as recalled in the chapter, "Eyes Right!"--and yet not realize that anything is missing. In both cases there was nothing wrong with the patient's eyes; it was the brain's processing of the

visual information that had gone haywire. Neurologist Oliver Sacks, who has a wonderful way with words and a strong desire to understand and appreciate the human being that still exists despite the disorder or neurological damage, treats the reader to these and twenty-two other tales of the bizarre in this very special book. My favorite tale is Chapter 21, "Rebecca," in which Dr. Sacks shows that a person of defective intelligence--a "moron"--is still a person with a sense of beauty and with something to give to the world. Sacks generously (and brilliantly) shows how Rebecca taught him the limitations of a purely clinical approach to diagnosis and treatment. Although the child-like 19-year-old didn't have the intelligence to "find her way around the block" or "open a door with a key," Rebecca had an emotional understanding of life superior to many adults. She loved her grandmother deeply and when she died, Rebecca expressed her feelings to Sacks, "I'm crying for me, not for her...She's gone to her Long Home." She added, poetically, "I'm so cold. It's not outside, it's winter inside. Cold as death...She was a part of me. Part of me died with her" (p. 182). Rebecca goes on to show Dr.

The first thing I did after reading this book was to hop back onto .com and order "Awakenings" and "An Anthropologist on Mars." This book was recommended by one of my philosophy professors in college about six years ago. Well, it took me six years to pick it up, and I don't regret the decision. As a complete layperson, my eyes were opened to what a complex piece of machinery the brain is. Sack's personal perspective on these patients disorders is what takes this interesting material and makes it fascinating reading. The only problem I had with this book was that I was disappointed to see most every chapter end. I wanted to know more about most every case. I only rank it 4 instead of 5 for that reason (It could have been more in-depth) and a couple of the cases were simply mildly interesting rather than mind-bending. It's almost incomprehensible to perceive the world and one's self in the same manner as some of these unfortunate people. I was especially intrigued by one of the questions Sack's brings up concerning the case history discussed in the chapter "The Lost Mariner." A man can remember nothing for more than a few seconds. His entire life, all of his experiences are gone almost as soon as they are past. "He is a man without a past (or future), stuck in a constantly changing, meaningless moment," Sacks writes. Sacks then ponders the question that will stop your heart: "Does he have a soul?" If you have ever been bothered by the question of the spiritual nature of man, Sacks --who stops well short of reaching any theological conclusions -- will disturb you with this material. From that standpoint, he is brilliant at informing by simply forcing the reader to ask questions of his or her self...

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