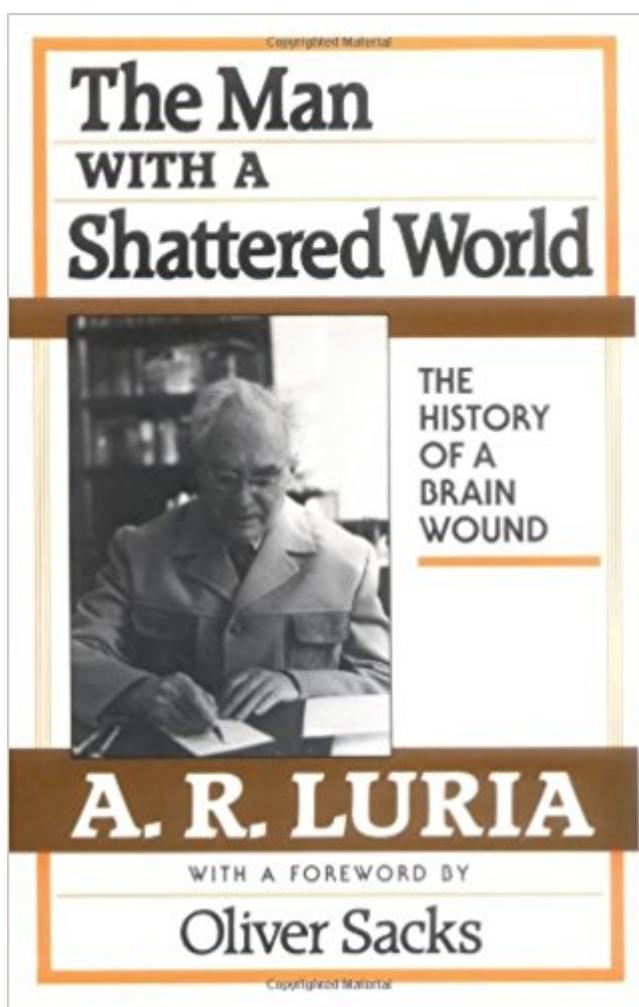


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The Man With A Shattered World: The History Of A Brain Wound



Synopsis

Russian psychologist A. R. Luria presents a compelling portrait of a man's heroic struggle to regain his mental faculties. A soldier named Zasetsky, wounded in the head at the battle of Smolensk in 1943, suddenly found himself in a frightening world: he could recall his childhood but not his recent past; half his field of vision had been destroyed; he had great difficulty speaking, reading, and writing. Woven throughout his first-person account are interpolations by Luria himself, which serve as excellent brief introductions to the topic of brain structure and function.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Originally published almost two decades ago, these fascinating and enormously informative case histories are now classics, each the product of almost 30 years of research by the late Soviet neuropsychologist Aleksandr Romanovich Luria. The Man with a Shattered World describes the heroic struggle of a young soldier trying to recover the memory and other mental capacities lost when a bullet entered his brain. Although different facets of mind are discussed in each [The Man with a Shattered World and The Mind of a Mnemonist], in a sense the two books are complementary, as memory is exaggerated in one and impaired in the other. What we know about the brain and mind is greatly enriched by either book. (Elliot Valenstein Boston Globe) Zasetsky in eloquent excerpts from a diary, comments on his struggle to recover the use of his brain. He could not even have written his journal, 3,000 pages that he cannot read himself, composed with appalling effort over a quarter of a century. had he not

learned to write automatically, without thinking of the process. It is a remarkable document, affecting in its simplicity, its pain, its inexorable determination. (Newsweek) The book is equally as remarkable a document as Luria's *The Mind of a Mnemonist* [Writing is Zasetsky's laborious way of thinking. His achievement is that he has managed, after untold agonies and frustrations, to describe his unending confusions with terrible clarity. It would take a lobotomized Samuel Beckett to match it. (Time)] This is an important and remarkable book [the product of the relationship between two remarkable men, one a world authority on the brain, the other his unfortunate brain-damaged patient] Luria has created a fascinating and valuable review of the strange but precise working of the brain for both the general reader and the scientist. This little book will become a classic. (Library Journal) A noted Russian neuropsychologist shares the remarkable story of his 25-year treatment of a young soldier who, in the aftermath of a serious wound, was forced to relearn even the simplest mental activities [The book emerges as an intriguing glimpse into the workings of the human brain] and an eloquent testament to one man's determination [Another of Luria's case histories, *The Mind of a Mnemonist*] traces the Kafkaesque experiences of a man with such an extraordinary memory that he has difficulty forgetting anything. (Philadelphia Inquirer) These two books [*The Man with a Shattered World* and *The Mind of a Mnemonist*] are compassionate and vivid portraits [he called them 'neurological novels'] though they are in fact case histories of two patients whom Luria observed for 30 years. (Los Angeles Times) [In *The Mind of a Mnemonist*] The Soviet psychologist Aleksandr R. Luria (1902–77) describes the life and personality of a man (known as 'S') who was found to have a literally limitless memory and whose burden was that he was able to forget things only by an act of will [The same publisher reissued *The Man with a Shattered World*, Luria's study of a young soldier who suffers a catastrophic head injury and has to relearn almost everything. In 1973 one reviewer called it an intriguing and 'valuable review of the strange but precise working of the brain.' Both are translated by Lynn Solotaroff. (New York Times)]

Text: English, Russian (translation)

I learned about this book from Oliver Sacks; he's often mentioned Luria as a hero and cited this book as an example of what he's trying to do. It is a case study--collaboration between doctor and patient--of a man who suffered severe effects from a brain injury incurred during the Second World War; he's lost most of his memory, including his education and how to do the simplest things; however his brain's intact when it comes to his personality. He's in the worst possible position, in a

way, because he's conscious of all his deficiencies, but he's almost powerless to correct them. Almost. But he can try. The part of him that can try is intact. This is a great book to read when you're depressed and feeling sorry for yourself because it makes you feel how lucky you are. The patient tries to get his life back by writing about his experiences: what he can do, what he can't do, what he's trying to do. It's heartbreakingly stunning, what can be accomplished by will alone--will is pretty much all the patient has left. A fascinating and moving book.

The author of neuropsychology has done a phenomenal job of describing not just the specific brain damage but also the incredible impact on the man's life [25 plus years]. The only change the publisher should make is use different fonts for when Luria is speaking AND ANOTHER WHEN THE PATIENT IS WRITING. It should be required reading for all who work with TBI patients.

Dr. Luria tells an marvelous account of a soldier's struggle to regain a personal sense of self after suffering a bullet wound to the head. The brave and enduring struggle of the soldier is very touching and allows you to appreciate cognitive function in yourself; while lamenting the tragedy of the soldier's plight. I read this book shortly after having a craniotomy to remove a meningioma from my brain. What I experienced for a week or two after the surgery was the soldier's reality, and much worse, for the remainder of his life. This book should be required reading for all.

I have always enjoyed the writings of Oliver Sacks, and now I was able to meet his mentor and the model for his approach to case histories. Luria shows why Dr. Sacks was so impressed--his thoroughness and compassion combine with meticulous clinical detail to form a fully dimensional picture of the subject.

Awesome insights

Here is a story of a man trying to restore himself following a brain injury. He struggles with an erratic, inconsistent memory which struggles with placing him in time with respect to location and context. Despite his struggle Luria's subject persists in the endeavour to find his lost self and reclaim the fractured shards of his life, stored in memory, into a cohesive whole, however, unfortunately never actually realising his goal. One can only commend the subject for his determination and his persistence and stand with him in his struggle. Who are we without memory.

I appreciate this book for what it offers in regards to understanding brain injury from a clients perspective. I found it repetitive in that Luria would explain what the client experienced in a similar way as the client explained it.

Zasetsky is a bright young student who goes to war (WWII) and exits with a bullet to his brain, and devastating amnesia. Over the course of the next 25 years, he struggles to come to terms with, to explain, to regain his life, his past, his future, his identity, his purpose. He writes and rewrites over 3000 pages of a journal even though the effort is beyond superhuman: he sometimes takes days to remember a single word or its meaning; a day of writing might yield a single paragraph; he cannot read or understand conversations; his right visual field is destroyed; and he is beset with an ever degrading memory, headaches, weakness, fatigue, depression, fear. "I can't see the first letter of a word clearly. It doesn't come through clearly but looks as if it's been plucked, gnawed around the edges, and what's left are scattered points, quills or threads that flicker like a swarm." Dr. A. R. Luria is a Russian neuropsychologist (and Oliver Sacks' mentor) who follows Zasetsky for 25 years. Combining his patient's journal and his own immense knowledge and compassion, he has compiled this little 130 page book which is heartbreakingly moving, and yet not for a moment self pitying. His so called "digressions" are marvelous, insights into brain science and psychology, explained in elegant and clear language. My only criticism is that the book could have done with some editing. The journal entries have a lot of repetition, and the sequence of sections doesn't always make sense. I also wish the "digressions" had been longer and more detailed. They could have been used to tie the book together, to show progression and narrative and tension. That said, I recommend it to anyone interested in neuropsychology, the brain's workings, and memory.

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