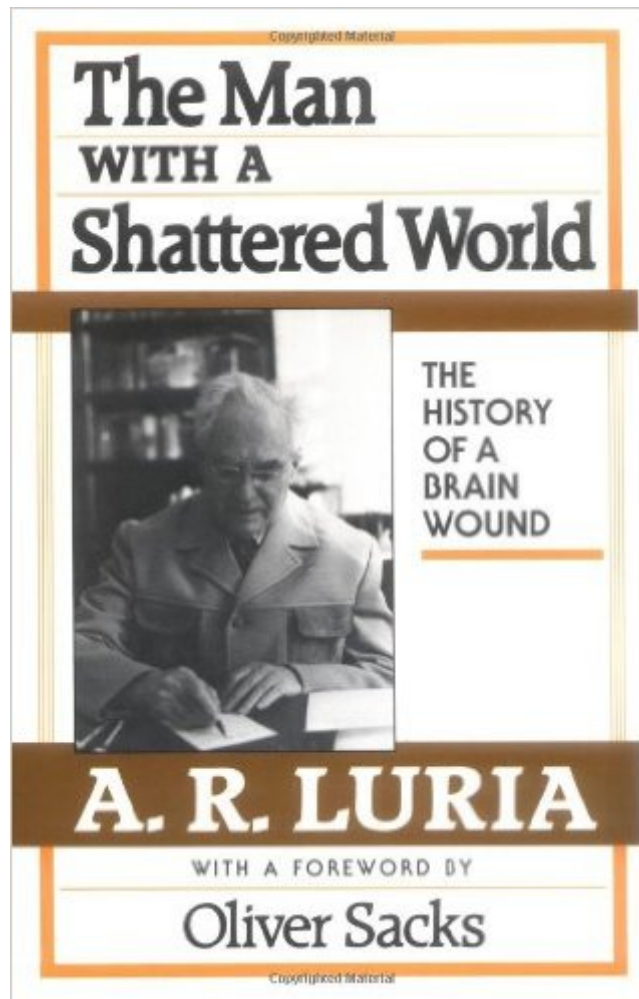


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The Man With A Shattered World: The History Of A Brain Wound



Synopsis

Russian psychologist A. R. Luria presents a compelling portrait of a man's heroic struggle to regain his mental faculties. A soldier named Zasetky, 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

This book is actually a collaboration between a famed psychologist and a Russian soldier who experienced a devastating head wound in battle in 1943. The soldier in vivid detail expresses how the head injury has permanently affected his life as well as how he processes perceptual information and communicates with the world. Very easy to read, I was clearly struck by the heroic measures made by the soldier to enlighten Luria and other readers on how his functioning was irrevocably altered by his brain injury. Normally complicated discussions on the brain are rendered easily understood in this book. I highly recommend this for anyone who works in the mental health field.

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 back by writing about his experiences: what he can do, what he can't do, what he's trying to do. It's heartbreaking but also stunning, what can be accomplished by will alone--will is pretty much all the patient has left. A fascinating and moving book.

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 heartbreaking, 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.

This book is an in-depth case study of one of Luria's patients, a soldier named Zasetsky who suffered a massive head injury in World War II. Much of the text of the book is comprised of Zasetsky's personal journal entries as he tries to make sense of what has happened to him, and document his losses, progress and experiences. Inserted into this journal are Luria's comments

explaining the extent of Zasetky's brain injury and providing background into the neuro-anatomy of the injury. Before the war, Zasetky had been a talented student and looked forward to a future in engineering. After his brain injury, however, he lost many of his mental abilities. He couldn't find the words he needed to express his thoughts or even understand words that were said to him. He was lost in his body, forgetting that he had a right side or where his forearm was. In this book, Zasetky painstakingly details his experiences, the very thoughts that were going through his mind as he tried to relearn language, and how to read and write. It is this aspect of the book, the journal of a highly intelligent and determined patient, that gives the book enduring relevance and interest. Luria's commentary both enhances the clarity of Zasetky's writing where necessary, and serves to put Zasetky's descriptions in a medical context. Unfortunately, this edition of the book can be somewhat confusing to read, since the differences in print between Zasetky's and Luria's contributions are very subtle. Luria's text is justified, while Zasetky's is not; the margins for each are the same. Thus, one must pay close attention to either the right margin edges or pronoun usage to figure out which author is writing. To facilitate comprehension, it would have been better if a different typeface had been used for each author.

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