

Chapter 1 : Review: Musicophilia by Oliver Sacks | Books | The Guardian

Norman Doidge explores the legacy of Oliver Sacks, whose work and life remind us that humanity belongs at the heart of medicine Oliver Sacks emerges from Lake Tahoe in a swimming cap and goggles.

Check, check and check. All of these are explored in *Musicophilia*, a fascinating series of essays by Dr. His writing is clear, civilized and genial, if occasionally repetitive and dryly scientific. A more ruthless editor might have helped. Drawing from more than half a century of clinical work as a neurologist, Sacks recounts tales of patients whose conditions have something to do with music. Among his subjects are people who: Her professor, recognizing his own lecture notes written verbatim on an exam, thought she was cheating until he discovered her gift. And there are eye-opening tales about composers like Ravel, whose famous Bolero, with its relentless repetition, might have been influenced by his frontotemporal dementia, and Shostakovich, who refused to have a piece of shrapnel removed from his head because it mysteriously provided him with music which he then incorporated into his compositions. Also included is the incredibly moving story of concert pianist and teacher Leon Fleisher, whose loss of the use of his right hand for three decades transformed his life and approach to art. And what about those people who hate or feel indifferent towards music? One of them was the great writer Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote: In a work filled with jaw-dropping stories, one of the most incredible happened to Sacks himself. One day he woke up from a musical dream, which followed him throughout the day. I found something deeply disturbing and unpleasant about the music, and longed for it to stop. I had a shower, a cup of coffee, went for a walk, shook my head, played a mazurka on the piano – to no avail. The hateful hallucinatory music continued unabated. Finally I phoned a friend, Orlan Fox, and said that I was hearing songs that I could not stop, songs that seemed to me full of melancholy and a sort of horror. The worst thing, I added, was that the songs were in German, a language I did not know. Orlan asked me to sing or hum some of the songs. I did so, and there was a long pause. How did you guess? And in the moment that Orlan interpreted the dream, the music disappeared; it has never recurred in the thirty years since. Near the end, Sacks provides an illuminating and moving chapter on the connection between grief and music. How come some compositions provide consolation and catharsis? I noticed Sacks cites a study by a Simon Baron-Cohen. Thank you for such an outstanding review. Sacks is such an elegant writer, and his work makes you marvel at the mysteries of the brain. He has an equal interest in telling an affecting, human story and with exploring how and why the brain works. While lots of science writing is dry and objective as it should be and while mainstream feature writing often ignores the more complicated science stuff, Sacks is a rare talent who has a penchant for story telling and for explaining the newest research on the brain. In *Musicophilia*, Sacks focuses on the mysterious and fascinating connection between music and the brain. For example, the book opens with a middle-aged man who is struck by lightning. Why has this happened? Why is unaffected except for this urge, which takes over his life? Brain scans show that his left frontal lobe has been damaged and Sacks hypothesizes that the left hemisphere of the brain might actually inhibit the more creative and musical right side of the brain. The structures of the chapters are very satisfying to me: These people, who all have strangely elfin features, suffer from severe mental disabilities: They have IQs around However, they also tend to be very verbal, very social, and exceptionally musical. Most have perfect pitch and start composing as toddlers. As in all of his tales, Sacks is sure to find the hope and humanity in even the most difficult patients. One man, an amnesiac who has a short-term memory of only a few seconds, can only stay present within himself while he plays the piano. In *Musicophilia*, I was truly moved by what I read - both by the humanity of the patients and by the awesomeness of the science.

Chapter 2 : Oliver Sacks, Neurologist, Author, Migraineur - racedaydvl.com

I took many pictures of Oliver Sacks during our life together "and not just because I adored him. He was an irresistible subject for a photographer, with his bushy beard, sparkling bespectacled.

I enjoyed these briefly, and dreams of flying and in a different way when I went horse riding in the village near school. And sweet hay smell. Most of all, I love motorbikes. My father had one before the war a Scott Flying Squirrel with a big water-cooled engine and an exhaust like a scream. And I wanted a powerful bike too. By the time I was 14, it was understood that I was going to be a doctor. My mother and father were both physicians and so were my two older brothers. I was not sure however, that I wanted to be a doctor. I could no longer nourish ambitions to be a chemist. Chemistry itself had advanced beyond the 18th and 19th century in organic chemistry, I love so much. When I got my scholarship to Oxford, I faced a choice. Should I stick to zoology or become a pre-med student and do anatomy, biochemistry, and physiology? It was especially the physiology of the senses that fascinated me. How did we see color, depth, movement? How did we recognize anything? How did we make sense of the world? I have developed these interests from an early age through having visible migraines. Or even the ability to recognize anything. My vision could be unmade, deconstructed in front of me, and then be remade, reconstructed all in the space of a few minutes. Incidentally I think this is why I wrote my first book on migraine and devoted a third of it to visual migraine. I knew well of what I wrote. I met Oliver because he was lying down and I was standing up. He had broken his leg after having missed his leg for a long period. The guy was like a mess. He had lost his leg to his brain. There is beauty all over in the world, even in the most troubled places. But it takes a special kind of person to see the beauty here and there and there and to write it down and then somehow, in translation, it becomes more beautiful. The listening act was an empathic act almost always. People who were Touretters, people who were hallucinating all the time. You parade these people and then you add Oliver and all Oliver does is he makes them so real and so familiar that you lose the sense of them being other. And then, if a Harold Pinter or a Robin Williams or another great artist reads these accounts and decides to make a movie or a play about what Oliver has written about, then more people hear about these folks and the narrative just moves out from Oliver into the world and the end result is, and this is rare to say about anyone, any doctor, any artist, that the world gains new friends through the act of intimately sitting with these people and making them your friend. Then the friendship expands because poets do it. Then all of a sudden everybody can do it. And then I received a long handwritten letter from him in- looked like blue crayon. Perhaps the most important is that he created a precedent for things that I and others have then later done that was much easier to do because Oliver had paved the way. If it were a patient for instance, but he had this wonderful sensibility to look at not just the brain and the neurology of it, but the anthropology of it, the whole human-ness of it. Here in the flesh. I first met Oliver Sacks about 17 years ago. It was when my first book, *The Elegant Universe*, had just come out and I was invited to what you might call my first literary gathering. So there were a lot of writers in the room at this dinner. I recognized a lot of science writers, books that I had read, but then I spotted Oliver across the room. And it was he who I really wanted to meet because, look I have and had great respect for science writers. But to write about the afflicted, those who society for so long has kept under the radar, those who can make us uncomfortable and to find the beauty, and the humanity, and the grace in their stories and make us care about these individuals, want to know about these individuals, feel compelled to read about these individuals, and allow us to catch our breath at the surprising, sometimes debilitating, wondrous, poetic qualities that can emerge from but a small variation in the same handful of grey matter that we all have inside our heads. That was a ferocious talent and a rare gift. And I kept my composure. Again, I was like wow this is amazing. And then he said, but the book itself is a little slippery. Brian, Brian, what I mean is the book is literally slippery. So the next the- next time we crossed paths, Oliver and I crossed paths. It was actually in May of at the first World Science Festival. Because as -as Tracy said, Oliver was a great friend of the festival. You know he, year after year would sit in a chair just like this, oftentimes on this very stage. But the encounter that really sticks in my mind did happen at that first inaugural festival. It was an event that took place at the

Abyssinian Baptist Church on th street. And was anyone at that event? There were actually people at this event, up there in I mean Tracy Day and I were absolutely intent on creating different kinds of science programming, putting together unusual pieces to create an interesting experience and we spoke to Oliver about this and he got very excited about one idea we had, which was to pair him with the Abyssinian Baptist Church Choir. And do a program on music and the brain. The people were just squeezing into the pews. About to give a tag team sermon on science at a Baptist church. The speed of them could change. Well William James thought they could change theoretically, depending on how many events one could perceive in a second. Could be flashes of light. Wells deals with this in a fictional way in the time machine and in stories he writes where he imagines that people can be accelerated and then they will move with great speed through the world and the world will seem to be almost frozen or in slow motion and vice versa. So accelerated, they can easily catch a fly in midair. Can they really do that? They can really do it. They feel the flies are rather slow. And so with the rest of us. They do more and experience more in a particular time. William James wrote, in an allied context, he said monkeys these people seem to us, whilst we seem to them reptilian. Now the term reptilian, while the unpleasant word, is sometimes used for the relative lack or slowness of facial expression and of movement generally in people with Parkinsonism. And Parkinsonism, is almost physiologically, the opposite of Tourettes. Both of these depend on what one has been looking at, the amount of a transmitter called dopamine in the brain. My brother had been a mental patient most of his adult life. And I thought it would be a book Oliver would find of interest if I could get it to him. I never had an email from him at all. Twenty years we knew another. But he wrote letters and he wrote them by hand. They would have editing within it. Clearly, he re-read them, wanted to make sure that he said what he wanted. But to be able as a writer, to make us understand how wondrous and complicated the workings of any human mind are. The meanest of us has something here that is more complicated than anything in the known universe. And he enabled us to understand the ways that difference and individuality could show themselves forth. I first saw Oliver when I was a medical student. This was in the period to at Albert Einstein College of Medicine up in the Bronx and it was pointed out that he was an eccentric member of the faculty. He rode a motorcycle. He wore a leather jacket. He rode a motorcycle to rounds. But it was in an era of eccentricity where amongst other things, psychiatric clinics were set up in pool halls in the South Bronx. And he was only contemplating some mode of expression for himself. He would submit many of these articles to major American medical journals and they would just be rejected as being too journalistic, too descriptive. There were no statistics of what he did. It- it was his discussion, and his perception of the patient, and the world of the patient and how the patient functioned within the realm of disease he suffered from. Oliver was able to take in almost any kind of information and for Oliver, extraneous information, what most physicians would consider to be extraneous information. And for anyone we consider to be extraneous information in any number of capacities in which Oliver worked, operated, was really just fodder for his imagination. How they could fit this into their world and leadâ€”lead- lead a creative and productive life despite what other impediments they ran across. And he attempted to assist them. And he tried to assist them in that process and in many cases did.

Chapter 3 : Sacks, Oliver [WorldCat Identities]

Neurologist and author Oliver Sacks has written numerous works on patients with often unusual conditions. His titles include 'Awakenings' and 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.'

It can persuade us to buy something, or remind us of our first date. It can lift us out of depression when nothing else can. It can get us dancing to its beat. But the power of music goes much, much further. Indeed, music occupies more areas of our brain than language does--humans are a musical species. Here, he examines the powers of music through the individual experiences of patients, musicians, and everyday people. Heard someone call your name in an empty house? Sensed someone following you and turned around to find nothing? Much more commonly, they are linked to sensory deprivation, intoxication, illness, or injury. People with migraines may see shimmering arcs of light or tiny, Lilliputian figures of animals and people. People with failing eyesight, paradoxically, may become immersed in a hallucinatory visual world. Hallucinations can be brought on by a simple fever or even the act of waking or falling asleep, when people have visions ranging from luminous blobs of color to beautifully detailed faces or terrifying ogres. Those who are bereaved may receive comforting "visits" from the departed. Humans have always sought such life-changing visions, and for thousands of years have used hallucinogenic compounds to achieve them. As a young doctor in California in the s, the author had both a personal and a professional interest in psychedelics. These, along with his early migraine experiences, launched a lifelong investigation into the varieties of hallucinatory experience. Also describes their lives, the transformation after awakening, and then describes parts of the film made from these case studies Seeing voices: For all of these people, the challenge is to adapt to a radically new way of being in the world. There is Lilian, a concert pianist who becomes unable to read music and is eventually unable even to recognize everyday objects, and Sue, a neurobiologist who has never seen in three dimensions, until she suddenly acquires stereoscopic vision in her fifties. There is Pat, who reinvents herself as a loving grandmother and active member of her community, despite the fact that she has aphasia and cannot utter a sentence, and Howard, a prolific novelist who must find a way to continue his life as a writer even after a stroke destroys his ability to read. And there is the author himself, a doctor who tells the story of his own eye cancer and the bizarre and disconcerting effects of losing vision to one side. He explores some very strange paradoxes, people who can see perfectly well but cannot recognize their own children, and blind people who become hyper visual or who navigate by "tongue vision. How do we see? How do we think? How important is internal imagery, or vision, for that matter? Why is it that, although writing is only five thousand years old, humans have a universal, seemingly innate, potential for reading? This book is a testament to the complexity of vision and the brain and to the power of creativity and adaptation. For him, islands conjure up equally the romance of Melville and Stevenson, the adventure of Magellan and Cook, and the scientific wonder of Darwin and Wallace. Drawn to the tiny Pacific atoll of Pingelap by intriguing reports of an isolated community of islanders born totally colorblind, Sacks finds himself setting up a clinic in a one-room island dispensary, where he listens to these achromatopic islanders describe their colorless world in rich terms of pattern and tone, luminance and shadow. And on Guam, where he goes to investigate the puzzling neurodegenerative paralysis endemic there for a century, he becomes, for a brief time, an island neurologist, making house calls with his colleague John Steele, amid crowing cockerels, cycad jungles, and the remains of a colonial culture. Out of an unexpected journey, Sacks has woven an unforgettable narrative which immerses us in the romance of island life, and shares his own compelling vision of the complexities of being human The river of consciousness by Oliver Sacks Book 27 editions published between and in English and Korean and held by 1, WorldCat member libraries worldwide "Two weeks before his death, Oliver Sacks outlined the contents of The River of Consciousness, the last book he would oversee. The best-selling author of On the Move, Musicophilia, and The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, Sacks is known for his illuminating case histories about people living with neurological conditions at the far borderlands of human experience. But his grasp of science was not restricted to neuroscience or medicine; he was fascinated by the issues, ideas, and questions of all the sciences. That wide-ranging expertise and passion informs the perspective of this book, in

which he interrogates the nature not only of human experience but of all life. In *The River of Consciousness*, Dr. Sacks takes on evolution, botany, chemistry, medicine, neuroscience, and the arts, and calls upon his great scientific and creative heroes--above all, Darwin, Freud, and William James. For Sacks, these thinkers were constant companions from an early age; the questions they explored--the meaning of evolution, the roots of creativity, and the nature of consciousness--lie at the heart of science and of this book. Among the most compelling and perplexing of these symptoms are the strange visual hallucinations and distortions of space, time, and body image which migraineurs sometimes experience. Portrayals of these uncanny states have found their way into many works of art, from the heavenly visions of Hildegard von Bingen to *Alice in Wonderland*. From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, over institutions for the insane were built throughout the United States; by , they housed more than a half million patients. The blueprint for these hospitals was set by Pennsylvania hospital superintendant Thomas Story Kirkbride: Kirkbride and others believed that well-designed buildings and grounds, a peaceful environment, a regimen of fresh air, and places for work, exercise, and cultural activities would heal mental illness. But in the second half of the twentieth century, after the introduction of psychotropic drugs and policy shifts toward community-based care, patient populations declined dramatically, leaving many of these beautiful, massive buildings - and the patients who lived in them - neglected and abandoned. Architect and photographer Christopher Payne spent six years documenting the decay of state mental hospitals like these, visiting seventy institutions in thirty states. Through his lens we see splendid, palatial exteriors some designed by such prominent architects as H. Richardson and Samuel Sloan and crumbling interiors - chairs stacked against walls with peeling paint in a grand hallway; brightly colored toothbrushes still hanging on a rack; stacks of suitcases, never packed for the trip home. Oliver Sacks, author of *Musicophilia*: In an effort to unravel the mystery, Nova puts Sacks himself into a functional MRI machine for two experiments.

Chapter 4 : Awakenings: How Oliver Sacks put a human face on the science of the mind - The Globe and I

Oliver Wolf Sacks, CBE FRCP (9 July - 30 August) was a British neurologist, naturalist, historian of science, and racedayv1.com in Britain, and mostly educated there, he spent his career in the United States.

Early life[edit] Sacks was born in Cricklewood , London, England, the youngest of four children born to Jewish parents: Samuel Sacks, a Lithuanian Jewish [7] [8] physician died June , [9] and Muriel Elsie Landau , one of the first female surgeons in England died , who was one of 18 siblings. Memories of a Chemical Boyhood. Sacks recalls, "I had been seduced by a series of vivid lectures on the history of medicine" and nutrition, given by Sinclair. Sacks focused his research on Jamaica ginger , a toxic and commonly abused drug known to cause irreversible nerve damage. As a result he became depressed: His parents then suggested he spend the summer of living on Israeli kibbutz Ein HaShofet , where the physical labour would help him. He spent time traveling around the country, with time scuba diving at the Red Sea port city of Eilat , and began to reconsider his future: I had become very interested in neurophysiology, but I also loved marine biology;. Seeing patients, listening to them, trying to enter or at least imagine their experiences and predicaments, feeling concerned for them, taking responsibility for them, was quite new to me It was not just a question of diagnosis and treatment; much graver questions could present themselvesâ€”questions about the quality of life and whether life was even worth living in some circumstances. During his years as a student, he helped home-deliver a number of babies. He completed his internship in June , but was uncertain about his future. After some interviews and checking his background, they told him he would be best in medical research. Taylor, the head medical officer, told him, "You are clearly talented and we would love to have you, but I am not sure about your motives for joining. He used the next three months to travel across Canada and deep into the Canadian Rockies, which he described in his personal journal, later published as Canada: He described some of his experiences in a New Yorker article, [20] and in his book Hallucinations. And then one day he gave it all upâ€”the drugs, the sex, the motorcycles, the bodybuilding. In July , he joined the faculty of Columbia University Medical Center as a professor of neurology and psychiatry. He was also a visiting professor at the University of Warwick in the UK. He accepted a very limited number of private patients, in spite of being in great demand for such consultations. He served on the boards of the Neurosciences Institute and the New York Botanical Garden [28] where he had been an extremely frequent visitor since he first moved to New York City, as well as a very active member of The Fern Society, which meets there. Writing[edit] In , Sacks first began to write of his experiences with some of his neurological patients. His first such book, Ward 23, was burned by Sacks during an episode of self-doubt. He also counted among his inspirations the case histories of the Russian neuropsychologist A. Luria , who became a close friend through correspondence between and , until Dr. Auden encouraged Sacks to adapt his writing style to "be metaphorical, be mythical, be whatever you need". The patients he described were often able to adapt to their situation in different ways despite the fact that their neurological conditions were usually considered incurable. In his book A Leg to Stand On he wrote about the consequences of a near-fatal accident he had at age 41 in , a year after the publication of Awakenings, when he fell off a cliff and severely injured his left leg while mountaineering alone above Hardangerfjord , Norway. The title article of his book, An Anthropologist on Mars , which won a Polk Award for magazine reporting, is about Temple Grandin , an autistic professor. In his book The Island of the Colorblind Sacks wrote about an island where many people have achromatopsia total colourblindness, very low visual acuity and high photophobia. The second section of this book, entitled Cycad Island, describes the Chamorro people of Guam , who have a high incidence of a neurodegenerative disease locally known as Lytico-Bodig disease a devastating combination of ALS , dementia and parkinsonism. Later, along with Paul Alan Cox , Sacks published papers suggesting a possible environmental cause for the disease, namely the toxin beta-methylamino L-alanine BMAA from the cycad nut accumulating by biomagnification in the flying fox bat. In it he examined why ordinary people can sometimes experience hallucinations and challenges the stigma associated with the word. Much more commonly, they are linked to sensory deprivation, intoxication, illness or injury. The book was described by Entertainment Weekly as: An absorbing plunge into

a mystery of the mind. Most of the essays in "River of Consciousness" he had previously published in various periodicals or in science-essay-anthology books where he was one of many authors, and are no longer readily obtainable. Sacks specified the order of his essays in "River of Consciousness" prior to his death. Some of the essays focus on repressed memories and other tricks the mind plays on itself. Sacks was a prolific handwritten-letter correspondent, and he never communicated by e-mail.

Chapter 5 : Oliver Sacks - Wikipedia

I took many pictures of Oliver Sacks during our life together and not just because I adored him. He was an irresistible subject for a photographer, with his bushy beard, sparkling bespectacled eyes, expressive hands, gaptoothed smile and the athletic build of someone who could easily swim long distances, even into his 80s.

We take it for granted, but how is it possible? What is going on in our brains? But mostly Musicophilia is about the more mysterious, and currently inexplicable, ways in which music affects the brain, for good or ill. And when it affects the brain, it affects the whole person, as Plato knew, seeking to ban some types of music from his Republic for the health of the citizenry. People with aphasia can be taught to speak again through singing. On the other hand, previously healthy people begin to have "musical hallucinations", blasted by intrusive ghostly music during every waking second; and others have seizures in response to music, or "musicogenic epilepsy" - which, intriguingly, can be selective. But such a violent response to certain music might be more common than suspected: There is, of course, a continuum between the pathological states that Sacks discusses and everyday experiences of music. It is intriguing, too, to wonder where on the continuum certain historical figures could be placed. Here, for example, is Tchaikovsky as a child, weeping in bed: It is here in my head. Save me from it! Here, too, is Shostakovich, refusing to have a piece of shrapnel removed from his head, because when he tilted his head in a certain way he could hear music, which he incorporated into his compositions. At the other end of the continuum are those Sacks describes as "amusic", who do not seem to understand or feel music at all. And yet even profound amusia might be just an exaggerated form of a dysfunction, or adaptation, that affects us all. We might be drawn to this conclusion in a roundabout way, by seeing that, contrastingly, other people are awakened to profound musical powers after some kind of brain injury. A year-old man struck by lightning suddenly experiences an unquenchable thirst for music, learns to play the piano, and starts to compose. In a wonderful footnote, Sacks offers his own wry confession that "in I was taking massive doses of amphetamines", and experienced a heightening of his powers of musical memory and transcription, although his abstract reasoning was shot to pieces. This, he suggests, might be the effect of suppressing the work of the temporal lobes. And so the intriguing hypothesis develops that we might all have such latent musical talents, if only we could find the spigot and turn it. Sacks also describes a rare congenital disorder called Williams syndrome, in which people never develop mentally beyond the abilities of a toddler, but have an extraordinary musical facility, playing back any piece on first hearing. Though he never exactly spells it out, the melancholy supposition arises that a repression of musical potential is the price we pay for our powers of ratiocination. Some might think the price is too high.

Chapter 6 : An Anthropologist on Mars (Audiobook) by Oliver Sacks | racedaydvl.com

Dr. Oliver Sacks was a neurologist and best-selling author who explored the brain's strangest pathways. His work touched Hollywood, theater, even opera, and his legacy lasts in the stories he told.

Heart The acclaimed author and neurologist, Oliver Sacks, who has died aged 82, brought stories about unusual neurological cases to a wide audience. His writing managed to explore the complexities of the brain, while maintaining unwavering compassion for his patients. He is, perhaps, best known for books like *An Anthropologist on Mars* and *Awakenings*, both of which were adapted for Hollywood. After finishing his medical training in California, Sacks moved to the Bronx to take a position at Montefiore Hospital, which housed the first headache clinic in the nation. There, he cared for hundreds of migraine patients. Sacks, who also had migraine, found their symptoms compelling. He was particularly taken with hallucinatory aspects of migraine—“auras that could produce disturbances of speech, hearing, taste, touch and vision just before the onset of an attack. They reminded him of his own experiences with psychedelic drugs in California. It was in his search for medical descriptions of these phenomena that he stumbled on a book written by a Victorian physician named Edward Liveing, who wrote a detailed treatise about migraine in Friedman was an influential and formidable character in neurology, holding leadership positions in the American Neurological Association. But Sacks persevered, conspiring with a janitor to gain access to the clinical records he needed to finish the book. In the end, Friedman fired Sacks. But Sacks was happy and Faber and Faber were delighted to publish the book. The book itself was a tour de force. Paintings drawn by people who had experienced migraine aura enabled Sacks to visually describe what aura felt like. *Migraine*, however, is a book that ought to be read and understood as a product of its time. In , when it was published, psychosomatic medicine ruled headache medicine. It was a time when some headache specialists thought it was perfectly acceptable to attribute migraine solely to rage or personality flaws of the patient. However, Sacks had not given up the psychological completely. He argued that migraine served important psychological functions, for example providing respite for patients. He also warned that, although the migraine personality may be myth, people with migraine had many other problematic personality types that had to be dealt with at the clinic. So, although Sacks was a progressive physician in many ways, reading *Migraine* now can sometimes be a jarring experience. One thing is for sure. For if he insists that migraine is not just physiological, he does so to encourage physicians to look at the whole patient. Additional Reading Oliver Sacks. Interview with Oliver Sacks. Subscribe By providing your email address, you are agreeing to our privacy policy. We never sell or share your email address. Let us know at contact Migraine. Try again or let us know at contact Migraine. This article represents the opinions, thoughts, and experiences of the author; none of this content has been paid for by any advertiser. Learn more about how we maintain editorial integrity here.

Chapter 7 : Threepenny: Sacks, On Libraries

Oliver Sacks, a writer and neurologist, was the author of over a dozen books, including Hallucinations, Musicophilia, Awakenings, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, and On the Move. He died on August 30,

Oliver Sacks does not trust fiction. The difference lies not only in the prose and the overtly fictional form in which Funes is presented, but in the moral tone of the narrator. In the case-history which Dr Sacks provides of his patient Mr Thompson, he does not hold back from pronouncing him damned. Jimmie, the other Korsakov sufferer in the book, is granted a soul because he achieves short periods of concentration and repose during the hospital Mass: But who was the more tragic, or who was more damned – the man who knew it, or the man who did not? But that is the contradiction which Sacks fails to resolve, and it is, of course, largely for that reason that he is so read and admired in the literary world. Perhaps it is also the reason his books are almost invariably reviewed by writers and intellectuals rather than his fellow neurologists. He writes with the authority of a medical doctor not just of symptoms and diagnoses, but of intimations of immortality, and of the spiritual significance of remembrance of things past. He acts as the non-fictional conscience of imaginative art. My God, we are extraordinary, look how interestingly wrong we can go. After a thorough examination of the works of Oliver Sacks, you come away with the oldish thought that identity matters, as well as a new conviction that, along with good social relations, the purchase of a hard hat might be a useful hedge against soul death. The text of the revised edition of *Awakenings* is practically doubled by its footnotes, and *An Anthropologist on Mars* is itself almost a stand-alone footnote to *The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. Many of the case-histories are similar to the cases in the earlier book or amplifications of them. Sacks has the same spiritual concern for him that he had for Jimmie and Mr Thompson: Greg, I suppose, expressed no opinion either way, though he did enjoy the Dead concert to which Sacks took him, for as long as he could retain the memory of it. Sacks goes to stay with Dr Bennett and wonders at his capacity to perform tic-free operations while spending the rest of his time – which includes some hairy driving – ticing up a storm. For Sacks, this is an example of the will, the inner life, shining through: Rather than merely seeing the difference between patients as what they can or cannot manage, Sacks offers a disease-as-personality theory. In *Awakenings* he states: We would all applaud those who can overcome their disabilities, but it seems impertinent to consign those who are unable to do so – for whatever reason, biology or character whatever that is – to a spiritual wasteland. The others, the fighters, as Sacks puts it, who have retained their sense of identity, are, I suppose, Homo sacksian. He wants to present them, empathetically, in their totality, as persons rather than bundles of neurological symptoms. This is the current thinking, and a great improvement on cold medical authority, but if in their totality, which must include their disease, the patients have become depleted, it would seem decent to consider them more or less ill, rather than more or less persons. But then if your philosophical position is that illness takes its tone from character again, whatever that is, I suppose the latter view follows logically. Of course, Dr Sacks, in his authorial hat, is writing books, not being a medical consultant, but there is a disturbing moment in his examination of Dr P. Dr Sacks was consulted by Dr P. The fact that the appointment with Sacks was made and kept suggests that someone, if not Dr P. He talks to Dr P. The tests tell nothing, he says, of Dr P. Can you tell me what you find wrong, make recommendations? What I would prescribe, in a case such as yours, is a life which consists entirely of music. Music has been the centre, now make it the whole, of your life. We are not told how Dr P. Had I been the patient, I would have been left confused and deeply alarmed. Doubtless, something else happened here that Sacks does not write up, but it seems a curious lacuna. Agreeing with Freud that a full life – inner and outer – consists of work and love, Sacks finds most disturbing those patients who are most detached, most emotionally deficient. So do we all. Those who cannot connect – that is, those with whom Sacks cannot make a human relationship, to whom he can only relate as physician – are condemned. The two-way relationship needs to work for Sacks to feel comfortable. In the final essay of *An Anthropologist on Mars*, the autistic Temple Grandin is shown as a highly intelligent woman who has achieved an independent life as a biologist working primarily with cattle. Sacks visits her and she explains how her autism has prevented her from having the normal experiences from

which social knowledge is constructed. Sacks is very moved by Grandin, and impressed. He knows as a neurologist the emotional limits of autistic patients and the difficulties living holds for them, even if they are fortunate enough to be highly intelligent. Sacks tells us, by way of ending both the essay and the book: He will hug and wants to feel a reciprocation. Doubtless we all do, but this is the human Oliver Sacks trying to connect, rather than an equally human Dr Sacks respecting the existential reality of his patient. Moreover, the moment provides a moving conclusion to his story. A story needs a conclusion whereas a case-history may not have one. In fact, stories have all kinds of needs that a case-history will not supply, and Sacks is insistent that he is writing the stories of his patients, not their cases. This is not intended to fudge fact and fiction, but to enlarge patients into people. But metaphors are not in fact descriptions of people in their totality. They are intentional, and consciously or unconsciously edited tropes, not complete, contained narratives. This is hardly an overturning of the medicalising tendency of doctors. And when we read these stories, as we do, to tell us more about ourselves, we read them as exaggerations of what we are, as metaphors for what we are capable of. Their subjects may not be patients as freaks, but they are patients as emblems. They are, as it were, for our use and our wonderment. Around their illness, the thoughts of Leibniz, Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Proust are hoist like scaffolding, as if to stiffen their reality into meaning. In *The Island of the Colour-Blind* Sacks the romantic is clearly visible, rather than merely inferred. It is a very different kind of book: *The Island of the Colour-Blind* is a somewhat misleading title, as Pingelap turns out to have a population of , of whom 57 are congenitally colour-blind. This would be fine if it was written with self-conscious humour, but Sacks continually tries to redeem the minor key of the story with grand claims for what to the lay reader seems only a mildly interesting situation. Colour-blindness "complete achromatopsia, seeing no colour at all, only degrees of luminosity that the colour-sighted would regard as grey, rather than the more common red-green colour-blindness" is also not new territory for Sacks. The narrative interest depended on the fact that Jonathan I. Not only do they see quite differently from the majority, and suffer, therefore, a degree of social stigma, but their condition carries with it an extreme sensitivity to light, so that they are only able to function fully in twilight and darkness. Although we lose the metaphor of the country of the blind, we do get quite a bit of medical information and develop a sympathy for their lot. Much of the story, however, is travelogue, as Sacks gathers about him a Norwegian achromat, Knut Nordby, an ophthalmologist friend, Bob Wasserman, and all their test equipment. Spam, it seems, is devastating the eating habits of Micronesia: But we were all revolted by the Spam which appeared with each meal "invariably fried; why, I wondered, should the Pingelapese eat this filthy stuff when their own basic diet was both healthy and delicious? As he lands on Pingelap, children arrive to investigate. I thought, I have arrived. I am here at last. I want to spend the rest of my life here" and some of these beautiful children could be mine. Another neurological mystery is found on Guam. A disease known as lytico-bodig, which has elements of both Parkinsons and motor neurone disease, is endemic and goes back in families to the beginning of the last century. Again, this is old Sacks territory. The variety of the symptoms and their late onset, as well as the Parkinsonian aspects, are reminiscent of his post-encephalitic patients in *Awakenings*. The situation presents a great challenge to the brain investigators who have yet to find the cause. It may be the result of a craving for the seeds of a particular cycad which is used by the locals as flour for tortillas and tamales. The seeds are poisonous unless lengthily prepared. It may also be the result of what seemed to be naturally very low calcium and magnesium levels. In any event, the affected families are suffering greatly, and Sacks visits them, observing and making tests. The disease seems to be self-limiting. This is not the first time the locals have met neurologists. The doctor who lives on Guam and tries to make the lives of sufferers more comfortable says: Metaphors for the sublime come readily to Dr Sacks from out-of-the-way places and medical conditions, and perhaps the plethora of them in this book will work better in the visual medium of television, but after my rereadings of his other works, I began to long for someone to come along and fill instances of the mundane everyday with meaning. There must surely, I found myself brooding, be some significance in the ordinary.

Chapter 8 : Oliver Sacks | Books | The Guardian

Oliver Sacks is a physician, best-selling author, and professor of neurology at the NYU School of Medicine. He is the author of many books, including Musicophilia, Awakenings, and The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat.

It was here that I found *The Jungle Book*; I identified deeply with Mowgli, and used his adventures as a taking-off point for my own fantasies. The oak-paneled library was the quietest and most beautiful room in the house, to my eyes, and it vied with my little lab as my favorite place to be. I would curl up in a chair and become so absorbed in what I was reading that all sense of time would be lost. Whenever I was late for lunch or dinner I could be found, completely absorbed by a book, in the library. I learned to read early, at three or four, and books, and our library, are among my first memories. But the Ur-library, for me, was the Willesden Public Library, our own local public library. On the whole, I disliked school, sitting in class, receiving instruction; information seemed to go in one ear and out by the other. As I got older, my reading was increasingly biased towards the sciences, especially astronomy and chemistry. It was in the Bodleian that I stumbled upon the now-obscure and forgotten works of Theodore Hook, a man greatly admired in the early nineteenth century for his wit and his genius for theatrical and musical improvisation he was said to have composed more than five hundred operas on the spot. The magnificent library building itself had been designed by Christopher Wren, and beneath this, in an underground maze of heating pipes and shelves, were the vast subterranean holdings of the library. How absurd some of these were, but how magnificent the language! All of these books were freely available, not in some special, locked-away rare books enclave, but just sitting on the shelves, as they had done I imagined since their original publication. I first came to New York City in , and at that time I had a horrid, pokey little apartment in which there were almost no surfaces to read or write on. I was just able, holding an elbow awkwardly aloft, to write some of *Migraine* on the top of the refrigerator. I longed for spaciousness. Fortunately, the library at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, where I worked, had this in abundance. I would sit at a large table to read or write for a while, and then wander around the shelves and stacks. I never knew what my eyes might alight upon, but I would sometimes discover unexpected treasures, lucky finds, and bring these back to my seat. All of us in the library were reading our own books, absorbed in our own worlds, and yet there was a sense of community, even intimacy. But a shift was occurring by the s. I would continue to visit the library frequently, sitting at a table with a mountain of books in front of me, but students increasingly ignored the bookshelves, accessing what they needed with their computers. Few of them went to the shelves anymore. The books, so far as they were concerned, were unnecessary. And since the majority of users were no longer using the books themselves, the college decided, ultimately, to dispose of them. I was horrified when I visited the library a couple of months ago and found the shelves, once overflowing, sparsely occupied. Over the last few years, most of the books, it seems, have been thrown out, with remarkably little objection from anyone. But I do not use a computer, and I am deeply saddened by the loss of books, even bound periodicals, for there is something irreplaceable about a physical book: He died on August 30,

Chapter 9 : Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain by Oliver Sacks

Oliver Sacks changed my whole way of thinking about how the mind works, and the many ways there are to be a human being. Like many of his readers I would say I love him even though I will never get the chance to meet him in the flesh.