

6. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, and Other Clinical Tales*

“Lotus Curves” – Love of Nature



Oliver Sacks, Touchstone 1998

Dr. Sacks, a neurologist with a strong interest in neuropsychiatry, tells how he treated each patient as an individual and not as an “illness.” For example, we can observe the physical symptoms of epilepsy in the brain, but the interactions of seizures with the way an epileptic person thinks and feels are much harder to understand, because his or her thoughts and feelings are not scientifically observable.

Sacks also notes that patients with very low IQs can be almost uncorrupted, in terms of emotional functioning. They may have a beautiful, child-like appreciation for and love of nature. And, different again, “idiot savants” are observed to be truly gifted, outside a clinical (unnatural) setting where challenges can be apparent. A savant with a musical gift can appreciate all of Bach’s complexities, with musical expression full of the most tender and intuitive spirituality, as though he communes with Bach himself, via the music. (See Chapter 22, *A Walking Grove*, esp. pp. 191-2.)

In Chapter 14, *The Possessed*, esp. pages 122-125, Sacks describes a Tourette’s syndrome patient, saying of this type of patient that, “He may be faced, from earliest childhood, with extraordinary barriers to individuation, to becoming a real person.” And, in Chapter 23, *The Twins*, (pp. 195 – 213), Sacks describes the special, almost reverent way in which “idiot savants” twins play twin-games with numbers. Their ability to “see” when a very large number is a prime number, is part and parcel of their special relationship. They can be seen to enjoy this mutual interaction as though it were a kind of spiritual dance between themselves and a visual “math of the universe.”

Twins?



*Annie is an identical twin. She knows how to share physical and emotional space with another human being, expecting a degree of consideration and respect that non-twins rarely understand.*

*She believes she was born with a natural empathy that is part of the twin relationship; yet, the twin relationship also isolated her. She spent much time with her twin, growing up, and was accustomed to being perceived by the world as a twin rather than as an individual.*

*A modern-world education has trained Annie in intellectual thinking; yet she often experiences a moment such as that described on page 200 of this book, where the twins “...seemed surprised at my surprise; as if I were somehow blind.” So, if Annie appears unusual sometimes, it may be because she is not easily stereotyped. Annie regrets that Sacks’ approach to patients, recognizing and treating their individualities, has mostly gone out of style. The next book looks at the individual in society, asking what makes people good, and what makes a good society.*