



The Man with the Electrified Brain: Adventures in Madness

Simon Winchester

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“A GRIPPING DESCRIPTION OF A JOURNEY TO HELL AND BACK, ONE THAT WILL TAKE ITS PLACE BESIDE WILLIAM STYRON’S ‘DARKNESS VISIBLE’ AND KAY REDFIELD JAMISON’S ‘AN UNQUIET MIND.’” —OLIVER SACKS

“I glanced at myself in a mirror and, though unshaven, and my hair still morning-tousled, I appeared to be just the same. It was inside, inside my head, where all had become so wretchedly different. I had the night before been incontrovertibly a man of stable mood, of calm, of good cheer and unforced bonhomie. Now I had become changed, with dreadful suddenness, into another being altogether.”

Simon Winchester has never shied away from big, even enormous, topics—as evidenced by his bestselling biography of the Atlantic Ocean, his account of the Krakatoa volcanic eruption, and his wildly popular “The Professor and the Madman,” about the making of the Oxford English Dictionary. In his Byliner Original “The Man with the Electrified Brain,” he takes on arguably his most daunting subject yet: his own flirtation with madness, and one of nature’s greatest and most enduring mysteries, the human brain.

As a geology student in his second year at Oxford, Winchester was known as a young man of even temper and keen intellect, until one June morning when he woke to find himself “changed with dreadful suddenness into another being altogether,” his normal life “slumped into chasm” and “folded in the dirt.” For a period of nine days, he lived in immobilizing fear. Everyday items—familiar paintings, a pile of books, his own robe hanging from a hook—became objects of horror; the world lost color, purpose, all sense and safety. When the episode finally passed, he returned to normal, presuming that what had happened to him was a fluke. It wasn’t. The episode repeated itself at unpredictable and dangerous intervals for four years—always lasting for nine days—and very nearly caused the author’s death while he was on an expedition in the Arctic.

What was wrong with him? Where could he find help? Would he spend the rest of his life anticipating the return of these mental blackouts? With the urgency of a whodunit, Winchester describes the coming and going of these terrifying dissociative states and the chance encounter that led to the controversial treatment of electroconvulsive therapy, which may or may not have cured him once and for all.

Written by a consummate storyteller, “The Man with the Electrified Brain” locates that finest of lines between sanity and insanity and is Winchester’s most riveting and deeply personal work yet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Winchester, a former foreign correspondent for “The Guardian” and the London “Sunday Times,” has written twenty-five books of nonfiction, many of which have been international bestsellers, among them “The Professor and the Madman,” “Krakatoa,” “The Map that Changed the World,” “The Man Who Loved China,” and “Atlantic.” “The Men Who United the States” is to be published in October. Simon Winchester was sworn in as an American citizen on the afterdeck of the USS Constitution on Independence Day 2011, though he retains the OBE awarded him by HM the Queen “for services to literature” in 2006. He lives in the Berkshires, in western Massachusetts.

PRAISE FOR “THE MAN WITH THE ELECTRIFIED BRAIN”

“A graceful, moving, and insightful account of a devastating condition which lies at the edge of our understanding of mental life.” —Steven Pinker, Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology, Harvard University, and author of “How the Mind Works”

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