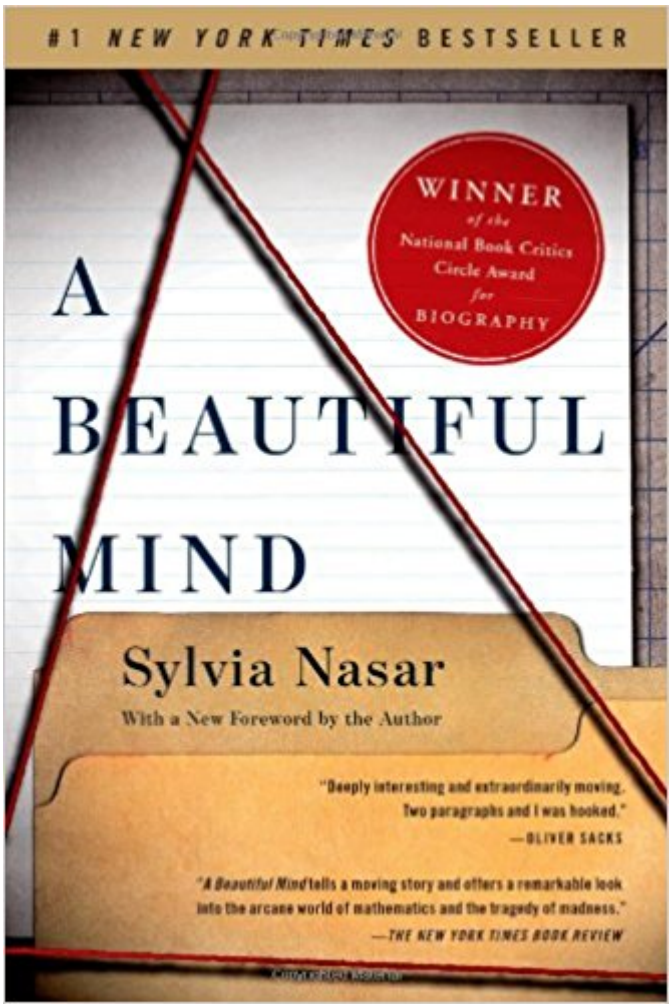
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A Beautiful Mind



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Synopsis

In this powerful and dramatic biography Sylvia Nasar vividly recreates the life of a mathematical genius whose career was cut short by schizophrenia and who, after three decades of devastating mental illness, miraculously recovered and was honored with a Nobel Prize.Ã¢â ¬Å“How could you, a mathematician, believe that extraterrestrials were sending you messages?Ã¢â ¬Â• the visitor from Harvard asked the West Virginian with the movie-star looks and Olympian manner. Ã¢â ¬Å“Because the ideas I had about supernatural beings came to me the same way my mathematical ideas did,Ã¢â ¬Â• came the answer. Ã¢â ¬Å“So I took them seriously.Ã¢â ¬Â• Thus begins the true story of John Nash, the mathematical genius who was a legend by age thirty when he slipped into madness, and whoÃ¢â ¬â •thanks to the selflessness of a beautiful woman and the loyalty of the mathematics communityÃ¢â ¬â •emerged after decades of ghostlike existence to win a Nobel Prize for triggering the game theory revolution. The inspiration for an Academy AwardÃ¢â ¬â œwinning movie, Sylvia NasarÃ¢â ¬â„¢s now-classic biography is a drama about the mystery of the human mind, triumph over adversity, and the healing power of love.

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Customer Reviews

Stories of famously eccentric Princetonians abound--such as that of chemist Hubert Alyea, the model for The Absent-Minded Professor, or Ralph Nader, said to have had his own key to the library as an undergraduate. Or the "Phantom of Fine Hall," a figure many students had seen shuffling around the corridors of the math and physics building wearing purple sneakers and writing

numerology treatises on the blackboards. The Phantom was John Nash, one of the most brilliant mathematicians of his generation, who had spiraled into schizophrenia in the 1950s. His most important work had been in game theory, which by the 1980s was underpinning a large part of economics. When the Nobel Prize committee began debating a prize for game theory, Nash's name inevitably came up--only to be dismissed, since the prize clearly could not go to a madman. But in 1994 Nash, in remission from schizophrenia, shared the Nobel Prize in economics for work done some 45 years previously.Economist and journalist Sylvia Nasar has written a biography of Nash that looks at all sides of his life. She gives an intelligent, understandable exposition of his mathematical ideas and a picture of schizophrenia that is evocative but decidedly unromantic. Her story of the machinations behind Nash's Nobel is fascinating and one of very few such accounts available in print (the CIA could learn a thing or two from the Nobel committees). This highly recommended book is indeed "a story about the mystery of the human mind, in three acts: genius, madness, reawakening." --Mary Ellen Curtin

Nasar has written a notable biography of mathematical genius John Forbes Nash (b. 1928), a founder of game theory, a RAND Cold War strategist and winner of a 1994 Nobel Prize in economics. She charts his plunge into paranoid schizophrenia beginning at age 30 and his spontaneous recovery in the early 1990s after decades of torment. He attributes his remission to will power; he stopped taking antipsychotic drugs in 1970 but underwent a half-dozen involuntary hospitalizations. Born in West Virginia, the flamboyant mathematical wizard rubbed elbows at Princeton and MIT with Einstein, John von Neumann and Norbert Wiener. He compartmentalized his secret personal life, shows Nasar, hiding his homosexual affairs with colleagues from his mistress, a nurse who bore him a son out of wedlock, while he also courted Alicia Larde, an MIT physics student whom he married in 1957. Their son, John, born in 1959, became a mathematician and suffers from episodic schizophrenia. Alicia divorced Nash in 1963, but they began living together again as a couple around 1970. Today Nash, whose mathematical contributions span cosmology, geometry, computer architecture and international trade, devotes himself to caring for his son. Nasar, an economics correspondent for the New York Times, is equally adept at probing the puzzle of schizophrenia and giving a nontechnical context for Nash's mathematical and scientific ideas. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I had watched the movie for the first time years back. I watched it recently, and upon impulse bough the book. I am glad I read the book. Usually, I used to think a movie can make you really feel

because it’s visual. This book changed that. "A Beautiful Mind" is a story of the tragedy that human life can become and like most things tragic, the silver lining usually exists.It is also the story about how after all, no matter how brilliant and intellectually superior we are, we are after all human. We make mistakes, we are unsure of what we want, we are afraid of being a failure, we crave for recognition and we love winning. Life is hard and we have to accept it and face it.

The book that inspired the movie. This is a biographical account of mathematician John Nash. If you enjoyed the movie you will like this book more as it contains a great deal more information that was not shown in the movie due to time constraints. Dr Nash was a very interesting fellow to say the least.

I appreciated this book for the depth of historical perspective it offered about mathematics, John Nash’s struggle with schizophrenia, and the politics involved in the Nobel prizes. Yet at the same time, that density of information made this a difficult book to read, more academic than pleasurable. For anyone who wants a well researched, well referenced and erudite approach, this is the book for you.

Mathematicians have received surprising attention in the last decade, some of this being negative and some positive. This book intends to give attention to a mathematician that is accurate as well as interesting. It succeeds in this in every way, and allows the reader an inside view of the mind of one of the most noted mathematicians of the twentieth century. It is now a cliche to say that when a book is good that one "cannot put it down", but this is what happened to me when I began to read it. It is a totally absorbing account of the life and mathematical discoveries of John Nash, and this is no doubt due to the fact that the biographer has solid technical competence. It would be very helpful to the entire mathematical community if the lives of the best of our mathematicians would be documented as well as Nash’s is here. Even from a solely didactic point of view, the mathematics of the mathematician can be better understood when it is put in an organized, historical perspective. There are many interesting insights and anedotes throughout the book. JN was apparently labeled as an "underachiever" by his elementary school teachers, with his worse grades being in music and mathematics. It is no surprise to learn that books were his best friends as a child, but it is interesting to learn that he spent much of his childhood performing experiments in his home laboratory. Mathematics is not really an empirical science, and Nash’s mathematical achievements rank more as pure than applied. Widely read, he also evidently preferred solving problems "in his head" rather

than via the ubiquitous pencil and paper. The biographer also gives interesting insights into the kind of university Princeton was at the time JN entered. In the Princeton department of mathematics, "Grades meant nothing" she quotes Solomon Lefschetz as saying. Emily Artin, the famous algebraist at Princeton at the time, apparently did not like Nash, clashing with him frequently in the "common room", and recommended that Nash be thrown out of Princeton. Also, the reader learns that game theory was viewed as somewhat "declasse" at Princeton, which is even more interesting considering its importance now in business and in research in artificial intelligence. The formalist school of mathematics held center stage at the time, and the biographer labels Nash's paper on the topic "one of the first to apply the axiomatic method to a problem in the social sciences". John von Neumann apparently thought his results "trivial" though, says the biographer. A whole chapter is spent on Nash's determination to avoid military service, for reasons that entering the military would preclude the obtaining of a prominent academic position. Nash's bisexuality is perhaps a surprise, if compared to the rest of the mathematical community, who are in general heterosexual, then and now. Attitudes about homosexuality cost him a job according to the biographer. In the current age of political correctness and diversity-with-bias, this would be unheard of. With reference to his personal life, Nash's relationship with Alicia was delineated beautifully by the biographer. Even a mind so given to abstractions as Nash's needs the concreteness and warmth of human interaction. The perplexing age anxiety of mathematicians is also brought out in the book. A perusal of the brilliant work of the over-40 Edward Witten and Andrew Wiles should of course put this (crippling) anxiety to rest. Nash's decision to work on the Riemann Hypothesis would perhaps, if he had continued to work on it, brought him to middle-age and beyond. One could perhaps speculate on what Nash would have achieved mathematically if mental illness would not have crippled him. Such speculation is superfluous though, as the contributions he made are more than most individuals have or could have made. His life hitherto has been one of overwhelming success, and his mind to be viewed with quiet envy.

Sylvia Nasar, the author, is the real genius here! Written in 2001, and consisting of more than 400 pages of facts and research all knit together to form a riveting story of a mathematical genius with Schizophrenia, this book is a chilling page turner.Rather than review what has already been posted over the years, I will just say the book is helpful if you have an interest in mental illness (and higher mathematics), are curious about Princeton and other ivy league universities, and have seen the movie. It is not an easy book to read. John Nash, the heralded math genius who would be around 83 years old now, fathered a son with the same illness.I take comfort in the fact that now, eleven

years since Nash was able to enter a remission and continue his quest in problem solving, there are no doubt better medications and more understanding of this disease.

This book was a required assignment for one of my math classes. When I got it, I was really shocked that was almost 500 pages. However, I started reading it and I got to a point that I had to read it every single day. I couldn't stop reading; it is an amazing biography. Maybe some of the passages tend to get a little bit boring, but they are important to learn and understand the whole story. It is really not compared at all to the movie "A Beautiful Mind", this is a very detailed biography about one of the most amazing mathematicians that I have ever heard about. After watching the movie, I admired Josh Nash, but I after reading this book my admiration has triple. He is just an outstanding person. I really loved the book!

This is a book every one in the country might wantto read. There are so many misconceptions about serious mental diseases. They rely on the wives of the criminals say "duh-I think he has Manic Depression" when the news interviews them. It's disgraceful. They most likely can't spell "manic".This was a beautiful book and movie. It's very personal to my family.

This is indeed the finest biography of an academic personality that I've ever read, second only to the "Emperor of Maladies: A Biography of Cancer" by Siddhartha Mukherjee. It's worth it! Although if you're not too fond of academia - equations, theories and scientific enquiry - you might skip this and watch the movie instead. Unless you'd rather read the story. in which case, go ahead, it's not too heavy either! Highly recommended!!

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