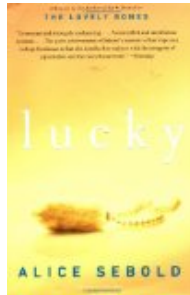


metapsychology

online reviews

[Home](#)[Browse Subjects](#)[Search](#)[New Reviews](#)[About Us](#)[Feedback](#)

MEMOIRS AND BIOGRAPHIES



Review - Lucky

by Alice Sebold
Scribner, 1999
Review by Susan Brison,
Ph.D.
Feb 2nd 2000 (Volume 4,
Issue 5)

Sometimes you *can* judge a book by its cover. The topic of Alice Sebold's recent memoir of surviving sexual violence is made clear in the quote on the front of the dust jacket: "In the tunnel where I was raped, a tunnel that was once an underground entry to an amphitheater, a place where actors burst forth from underneath the seats of a crowd, a girl had been murdered and dismembered. I was told this story by the police. In comparison, they said, I was LUCKY." And the tone of the book comes across immediately in the author photograph on the back cover which shows an appealing, feisty, rather cynical-looking woman whose squint and smirk seem to be daring the reading to engage with this story, while asserting a self-protective distance.

This rape memoir is tough, gritty, funny, and, occasionally, heart-breaking, without a trace of sentimentality or self-pity. It also struck me as the most searingly honest of all such memoirs I've read--and I've read quite a number of them in the last ten years--since I survived a near-fatal rape and attempted murder in 1990. I, too, was told I was lucky to be alive. Initially I thought so myself. I had no idea that the worst--the excruciatingly painful, seemingly interminable aftermath of rape--was yet to come.

Sebold recounts the aftermath of her rape in a straightforward, totally jargon-free way--in part, perhaps, because she encountered the professional psychological research on trauma only after having written much of this book. (She writes about having discovered Judith Herman's groundbreaking book, *Trauma and Recovery*, after she had written about her own assault in the *Sunday New York Times Magazine*.) Though her discovery of the psychological literature on trauma was presumably therapeutic--and liberating--the fact that this discovery came relatively late in her recovery process gives this memoir a fresh, unmediated feel. Sebold doesn't write about her recovery in terms of the neat phases of denial, anger, and integration that often appear in rape memoirs, and she never presents a romanticized vision of her pre-rape past.

RESOURCES

[✉ email page](#) [🖨 print page](#)

All Topic Reviews

["Are You There Alone?"](#)

["My Madness Saved Me"](#)

[365 Days](#)

[49 Up](#)

[A Beautiful Mind](#)

[A Beautiful Mind](#)

[A Beautiful Mind](#)

[A Book of Reasons](#)

[A Can of Madness](#)

[A Child's Life and Other Stories](#)

[A Dangerous Liaison](#)

[A Fight to Be](#)

[A First-Rate Madness](#)

[A Good Enough Daughter](#)

[A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering](#)

[Genius](#)

[A Lethal Inheritance](#)

[A Lethal Inheritance](#)

[A Life Shaken](#)

[A Little Pregnant](#)

[A Message from Jakie](#)

[A Million Little Pieces](#)

RELATED TOPICS

[Addiction & Alcoholism](#)

[Anxiety & Panic](#)

[Art and Photography](#)

[Audio Books](#)

[Childhood Disorders](#)

[Children and Teens](#)

[Client Reviews](#)

[Depression](#)

[Ethics](#)

[Fiction](#)

[General Topics](#)

[Genetics and Evolution](#)

[Grief, Loss, Death & Dying](#)

[Medications & Psychiatry](#)

[Memoirs and Biographies](#)

[Mental Health](#)

[Movies & DVDs](#)

[Personality Disorders](#)

[Philosophy](#)

[Psychoanalysis](#)

[Psychology](#)

[Psychotherapy](#)

[Relationships](#)

[Religion](#)

[Self-Help](#)

[Sexuality](#)

[Wellness and Complementary Medicine](#)

[Donate](#)

[Share](#)

[Like](#) 0

[Tweet](#) 0



Welcome to MHN's unique book review site *Metapsychology*. We feature over 6900 in-depth reviews of a wide range of books and DVDs written by our reviewers from many backgrounds and perspectives. We update our front page weekly and add more than thirty new reviews each month. Our editor is Christian Perring, PhD. To contact him, use the form [available here](#).

Can't remember our URL? Access our reviews directly via 'metapsychology.net'

Metapsychology Online reviewers normally receive gratis review copies of the items they review.

Metapsychology Online receives a commission from Amazon.com for purchases through this site, which helps us send review copies to reviewers. **Please support us by**

making your Amazon.com purchases through our Amazon links. We thank you for your support!

Join our e-mail list!
Metapsychology
New Review

She talks so candidly and insightfully about her upbringing in a dysfunctional family--in chapters that, roughly, alternate with chapters about her assault and its sequelae--that, at times, I wondered whether this was supposed to be primarily a memoir of rape or one of a deprived (psychologically-speaking) childhood. But, by the end of the book, it was abundantly clear that it was both, that is, an insightful account of a rape as experienced by someone who had already lived through a fair amount of trauma, though of a less sensationalistic sort. This is one of its most compelling characteristics: it never idealizes a pre-rape past or mourns a time of blissful innocence. It acknowledges that life can be hard, in various ways, both before and after a rape.

Although I agree with Judith Herman that it is the nature and severity of the trauma, much more so than the victim's pre-existing psychological profile, that determine the aftermath of violence, I have also come to see--as a researcher and as a survivor--how individual differences inform and inflect the way a traumatic experience is perceived and survived by a trauma victim. It is for that reason that I find Sebold's insightfully autobiographical account immensely informative.

Susan Brison is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Dartmouth College, where she also teaches in the Women's Studies Program. She has published in the areas of Philosophy of Law and Social and Political Philosophy. She is author of *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

new review

Announcements:

Sent out monthly, these announcements list our recent reviews. To subscribe, [click here](#).

Interested in becoming a book reviewer for *Metapsychology*? Currently, we especially need thoughtful reviewers for books in fiction, self-help and popular psychology. To apply, [write to our editor](#).

Metapsychology
Online Reviews



Promote your
Page too

*Metapsychology Online
Reviews*

ISSN 1931-5716



Follow @metapsych

[About Us](#) | [About CenterSite](#) | [Terms & Privacy](#)
Copyright © CenterSite, LLC, 1995-2013