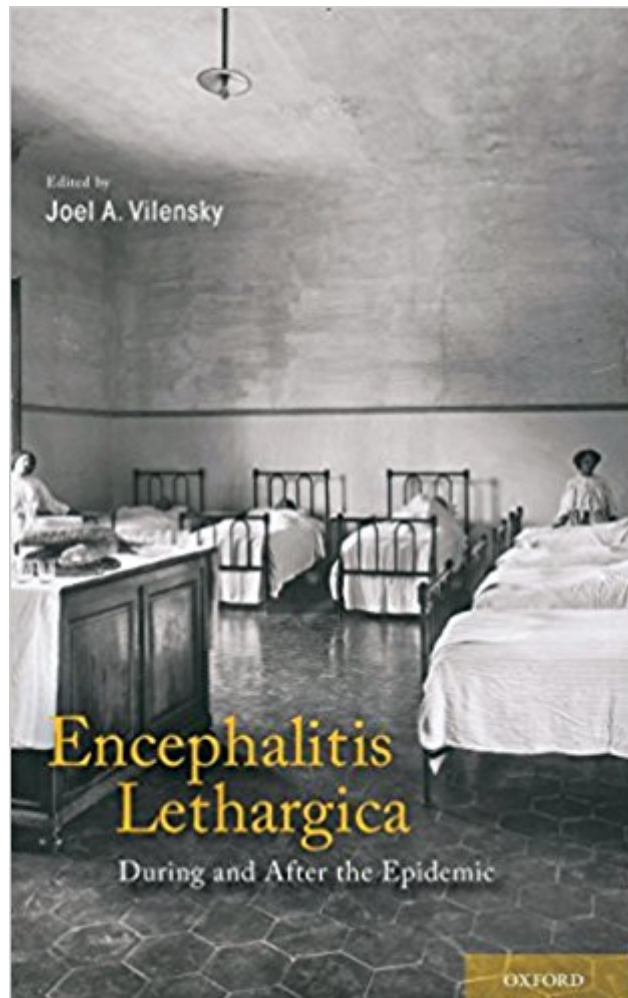




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# Encephalitis Lethargica: During And After The Epidemic



## Synopsis

Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Epidemic is akin to a detective novel about a major medical mystery that remains unsolved. During the 1920s and 1930s a strange, very polymorphic condition affected much of the world although not at the same time everywhere and certainly not with the same symptoms. This condition, encephalitis lethargica, could cause death in a short period, or a Rip Van Winkle type of sleep that might last days, weeks or months, but could also, surprisingly, cause insomnia. Its symptoms were thought to encompass almost anything imaginable, which made its diagnosis exceedingly difficult, to the point where its existence as a distinct neurologic entity could be questioned. Furthermore, even in those patients who appeared to recover from the disease, there was a large risk that they would subsequently develop a more chronic and devastating sequel believed to follow the disease in up to 80% of its victims, postencephalitic parkinsonism. This condition became much better known than its antecedent because of the Oliver Sacks' book, *Awakenings*, and the subsequent 1990 movie of the same name. *Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Epidemic* thoroughly describes the disease during the epidemic period and also details all the cases that have been reported since that time. Using language that the non-neurologist can easily understand, the book identifies the core features of this disease and tries to identify its cause. *Encephalitis Lethargica: During and After the Epidemic* also presents a thorough analysis of postencephalitic parkinsonism and its relationship to encephalitic lethargica. Whether this book solves the mystery of encephalitis lethargica remains to be determined, but regardless, as a result of this book, the number of clues available have been greatly increased. Accordingly, should encephalitis lethargica reappear, contemporary physicians will be prepared to diagnose and treat it because of the information provided in the book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This richly informative and highly readable book distills the vast literature on encephalitis lethargica. Joel Vilensky and his co-contributors examine the several vexed questions in the understanding of this elusive disease and include poignant testimony of sufferers. The volume gains additional importance as a resource should the epidemic form of the disease ever re-emerge." --John Booss, MD, Professor Emeritus, Departments of Neurology and Laboratory Medicine, Yale University School of Medicine, and Formerly National Program Director, Neurology Service Department of Veterans Affairs, West Haven, CT

From the Forward by Oliver Sacks "Joel Vilensky and the many eminent contributors to this volume have given us a new perspective on the "sleepy sickness," one that is comprehensive and scholarly but also beautifully organized and vividly written. He also brings together here a number of (often very poignant) self-reports, never before published or long forgotten. I think this excellent book will find a much wider readership too, for it is a moving human chronicle with profound implications for anyone concerned with the themes of sickness and health."

"These expert authors have provided detailed descriptions of the history of EL and answers to some, but not all, pertinent questions...warrants thought and appreciation for clear and informative writing." -- Neurology Today

"By extracting and synthesizing core information from monographs and journal articles published in various languages before, during, and after the epidemic, the author provides an unprecedented level of analysis in a readable format...Other modern graphics and tables enhance the usefulness of the information." --Doody's

"The present book edited by J.A. Vilensky, Professor of Anatomy and Cell Biology at the University of Iowa, USA, and written together with other experts, thoroughly describes all the cases reported in the world literature since that time...It is hoped that the present compilation and integration of the EL material provided in this book will enable a more profound view of both the EL occurring during the epidemic and sporadically occurring current cases, to allow a more effective response if an EL epidemic may appear in the future." -- K. A. Jellinger, European Journal of Neurology

Dr. Vilensky became interested in aspects of the history of neurology after a career investigating the neurological control of movement. He has published numerous articles on various aspects of neurologic history including on the work of the father of neurosurgery, Sir Victor Horsley. Dr. Vilensky authored a book on the WWI chemical warfare agent, lewisite, which surprisingly had a

critical role in the treatment of a severe neurologic disease, hepatolenticular degeneration (Wilson's disease). He became interested in encephalitis lethargica after acquiring some films from the 1920s of these patients. Besides the current book, Dr. Vilensky has authored five scientific articles on the disease. The Foreword by Dr Oliver Sacks is under copyright © to Dr Sacks.

This is a very informative book not only on the history of EL but also on the current issues of this type of Encephalitis. I wish there were more books like it.

A little bit too much talk and too little science. However, I did enjoy the book. It was engaging and I finished the book rather quick.

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