



The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain

By Alice Weaver Flaherty

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Why is it that some writers struggle for months to come up with the perfect sentence or phrase while others, hunched over a keyboard deep into the night, seem unable to stop writing? In *The Midnight Disease*, neurologist Alice W. Flaherty explores the mysteries of literary creativity: the drive to write, what sparks it, and what extinguishes it. She draws on intriguing examples from medical case studies and from the lives of writers, from Franz Kafka to Anne Lamott, from Sylvia Plath to Stephen King. Flaherty, who herself has grappled with episodes of compulsive writing and block, also offers a compelling personal account of her own experiences with these conditions.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Flaherty (The Massachusetts General Handbook of Neurology) mixes memoir, meditation, compendium and scholarly reportage in an odd but absorbing look at the neurological basis of writing and its pathologies. Like Oliver Sacks, Flaherty has her own story to tell a postpartum episode involving hypergraphia and depression that eventually hospitalized her. But what holds this great variety of material together is not the medical authority of a doctor, the personal authority of the patient or even the technical authority of the writer, but the author's deep ambivalence about the proper approach to her subject. Where Sacks uses his stylistic gifts to transform illness into literature, Flaherty wrestles openly with the problem of equating them, putting her own identity as a scientist and as a writer on the line as she explores the possibility of describing writing in medical terms. She details the physiological sources of the impulse to write, and of the creative drive, metaphorical construction and the various modes of stalled or evaded productivity called block. She also includes accounts of what it feels like to write (or fail to write) by Coleridge and Joan Didion as well as by aphasiacs and psychotics. But while science may help one to understand or create literature, "it may not fairly tell you that you should." To a student of literature, Flaherty's struggle between scientific rationalism and literary exuberance is familiar romantic territory. What's moving about this book is how deeply unresolved, in an age of mood pills and weblogs, that old schism remains. Writers will delight in the way information and lore are interspersed; scientists are more likely to be divided.

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"Researchers will soon be able to see which patterns of brain activity underlie creativity," Flaherty claims. By offering some powerful physiological theories for the creative process, Flaherty debunks the idea that creativity stems from psychological inspiration. A few impenetrable parts notwithstanding, she eloquently translates scientific information into layman's terms, instilling her narrative with fascinating literary and personal anecdotes and practical advice for writers. Citing skimpy evidence, scientists might take issue with Flaherty's claims. Yet Flaherty, who tries to remain impartial, expresses a deep ambivalence about the correct approach to creativity. The book, she emphasizes, is "not meant to be the final word on these complex subjects, but to spur further debate." For us locos, it certainly will.

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From [Booklist](#)

Why do some of us have an urge, a compulsion, to put words on paper? And what happens when, without warning, the words stop coming? The author, a neurologist, introduces us to an unfamiliar term: *hypergraphia*, the brain state that produces an overwhelming desire to write (she also introduces us to the brain state's flip side, which produces writer's block). By examining the elements of creative writing and tying them to various elements in the brain (for instance, there is a direct link between the temporal lobe and metaphorical thinking), Flaherty asks us to consider writing not simply as an art form but also as a manifestation of the way our brains work. Simplistic notions like the one that says creativity is a function of the right side of the brain go out the window, to be replaced by complex, yet entirely plausible, correlations between brain states and creative acts. This won't tell you how to find a publisher, but it will explain how you came to need one. *David Pitt*

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Users Review

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Wilma Shay:

This book untitled The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain to be one of several books in which best seller in this year, this is because when you read this reserve you can get a lot of benefit onto it. You will easily to buy this book in the book retail store or you can order it through online. The publisher of the book sells the e-book too. It makes you more readily to read this book, because you can read this book in your Smartphone. So there is no reason to you personally to past this guide from your list.

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Ryan Maggard:

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