

Stutter

Marc Shell

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One person can't help stuttering. The other can't help laughing. And in the way one bodily betrayal of better intentions mirrors the other, we find ourselves in the gray area where mind and body connect--and, at the damnedest moments, disconnect. In a book that explores the phenomenon of stuttering from its practical and physical aspects to its historical profile to its existential implications, Marc Shell plumbs the depths of this murky region between will and flesh, intention and expression, idea and word. Looking into the difficulties encountered by people who stutter--as do fifty million worldwide--Shell shows that, however solitary stutterers may be in their quest for normalcy, they share a kinship with many other speakers, both impeded and fluent.

Stutter takes us back to a time when stuttering was believed to be "diagnosis-induced," then on to the complex mix of physical and psychological causes that were later discovered. Ranging from cartoon characters like Porky Pig to cultural icons like Marilyn Monroe, from Moses to Hamlet, Shell reveals how stuttering in literature plays a role in the formation of tone, narrative progression, and character. He considers such questions as: Why does stuttering disappear when the speaker chants? How does singing ease the verbal tics of Tourette's Syndrome? How do stutterers cope with the inexpressible, the unspeakable?

Written by someone who has himself struggled with stuttering all his life, this provocative and wide-ranging book shows that stuttering has implications for myriad types of expression and helps to define what it means to be human.



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