



Seized: Temporal Lobe Epilepsy as a Medical, Historical, and Artistic Phenomenon

By Eve LaPlante

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Seized is a narrative portrait of a common brain disorder that can alter personality, illuminating the mind-body problem and the limits of free will. An invaluable resource for anyone touched by epilepsy, *Seized* gives first-hand accounts of three ordinary patients with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE), explaining what they suffer and how they cope. The book also tells the stories of creative luminaries diagnosed with or suspected of having TLE, including van Gogh, Dostoevsky, Lewis Carroll, Saint Paul, and Flaubert. The psychological implications of *Seized* are, according to *Publishers Weekly*, “staggering.” *Kirkus Reviews* called the book “Fascinating . . . LaPlante’s descriptions of the human brain are wonderfully concrete, her historical research is well presented, and her empathy for TLE’s victims is clear.” In this “fascinating account of medical research,” Howard Gardner noted, “LaPlante shows how a brain scar may cause bizarre aggressive or sexual behavior—and works of profound creative imagination.”

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) is the most widespread form of epilepsy among adults, yet TLE seizures are not easily recognized, unlike the far better known convulsions of grand mal epilepsy. In this major study, freelance journalist LaPlante, who interviewed scores of patients and doctors, explores a disease that may affect between one and two million Americans. During a TLE seizure, a person is overcome by powerful emotions, hallucinations, or vivid flashbacks. Some TLE sufferers perform automatic or violent acts; others exhibit hyper-religiosity or altered sexuality. LaPlante reviews the ordeals of Dostoevsky, van Gogh, Lewis Carroll and other luminaries thought to have suffered TLE. She also graphically profiles three ordinary TLE patients--Charlie, a lawyer minimally affected by the disease; Jill, a personnel director whose confidence has been shattered by her seizures; and Gloria, a retired hairdresser. If TLE often gets misdiagnosed as schizophrenia or mood disorder, as LaPlante suggests, the implications for psychiatry are staggering. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

The many readers who were intrigued by Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (LJ 2/15/86) will welcome LaPlante's book. More common yet less familiar than the physical manifestations of grand mal epilepsy, temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) is a response to abnormal electrical activity in the parts of the brain controlling feeling and memory. In TLE seizures, a patient experiences uncontrollable, intense emotions, sensory hallucinations, and vivid memories. Unlike grand mal epilepsy, the intervals between seizures are often marked by a common pattern of personality changes, typically including compulsive writing or drawing and hyper-religiosity. LaPlante interweaves the stories of three contemporary sufferers with accounts of famous people who probably had the disease, including Vincent Van Gogh, Soren Kierkegaard, and Lewis Carroll. Does the development of anticonvulsant drugs preclude another Alice in Wonderland ? A thoughtful final chapter examines TLE's conjunction of personality and physiology and its impact on our concepts of personhood, creativity, and free will. Highly recommended for all libraries. - *Kathy Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida-St. Petersburg Lib.* Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Kirkus Reviews

What did Moses, Van Gogh, Lewis Carroll, and Dostoyevsky have in common? Quite possibly temporal lobe epilepsy, according to this fascinating report by freelance writer LaPlante (*The Atlantic*, *Yankee*, etc.). Temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) is the most common form of epilepsy among adults. Its seizures bring hallucinations, dreamy states, bizarre feelings, and involuntary actions resembling the symptoms of psychiatric disease, and the personalities of its sufferers are frequently marked by an intense interest in religion and morality, a compulsion to write or draw, altered sexuality, aggression, and hypersociability. LaPlante traces the history of the disorder from its early definition by a 19th-century English neurologist to present-day efforts to understand and treat it with drugs and/or surgery. She chronicles its effects on three pseudonymous patients: Charlie, a lawyer whose first seizure occurred when he was in his 50s; Jill, a personnel director in her 30s whose life has been drastically affected by the onset of TLE; and Gloria, a middle-aged woman who's suffered from TLE all her life and had been treated for a myriad of psychiatric disorders prior to the diagnosis of TLE at age 37. What makes TLE especially intriguing are the clues it offers to biological bases of creativity, spirituality, and--on a less positive note--violence. Moreover, because TLE crosses the boundaries between psychiatry and neurology, research on it holds promise for a better understanding of the physiological causes of mental illness. LaPlante's descriptions of the human brain are

wonderfully concrete, her historical research is well presented, and her empathy for TLE's victims is clear. A well-done study. (Line drawings--not seen) -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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