



Muses, Madmen, and Prophets: Rethinking the History, Science, and Meaning of Auditory Hallucination

Daniel B. Smith

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The strange history of auditory hallucination throughout the ages, and its power to shed light on the mysterious inner source of pure faith and unadulterated inspiration.

Auditory hallucination is one of the most awe-inspiring, terrifying, and ill-understood tricks the human psyche is capable of. *Muses, Madmen, and Prophets* reevaluates the popular conception of the phenomenon today and through the ages, and reveals the roots of the medical understanding and treatment of it. It probes history, literature, anthropology, psychology, and neurology to explain and demystify the experience of hearing voices, in a fascinating and at times funny quest for understanding. Daniel B. Smith's personal experience with the phenomenon-his father heard voices, and it was the great torment and shame of his father's life-and his discovery that some people learn to live in peace with their voices fuels this contemplative, brilliantly researched, and inspired book.

Science has not been able to fully explain the phenomenon of auditory hallucination. It is a condition that has existed perhaps as long as we have-there is evidence of it in literature and even pre-literate oral histories from across all times and cultures. Smith presents the sophisticated and radical argument that a negative side effect of living as we do in this great age of medical science is that we have come to limit this phenomenon to nothing more than a biochemical glitch for which the only proper response is medical, pharmaceutical treatment. This "pathological assumption" can inflict great harm on the people who hear voices by ignoring the meaning and reality of the experience for them. But it also obscures from the rest of us a rich wellspring of knowledge about the essential source of faith and inspiration.

As Smith examines the many incidences of people who have famously heard voices throughout history-Moses, Mohammed, Teresa of Avila, Joan of Arc, Rilke, William Blake, Socrates, and others-he considers the experience of auditory hallucination in light of its relationship to the nature of pure faith and as the key to the source of artistic inspiration. At the heart of Smith's exploration into the many extraordinary, strange, sometimes frightening and sometimes almost supernatural aspects of auditory hallucination is his driving personal need to comprehend an experience that, when considered in good faith, is as profound and complex as human consciousness itself.

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