



A Field Guide to Melancholy

Jacky Bowring

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A depressive illness or a passing feeling? Mental detachment or a precursor to genius? Melancholy is a critical part of what it is to be human, yet everything from Prozac to self-help psychology books seems intent on removing all signs of sadness from contemporary existence. A Field Guide to Melancholy surveys this ambivalent concept and takes a journey through the articulation of melancholy in a variety of languages, from the Russian toska of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin to kaiho—which is expressed in the dancing of the Finnish tango. Melancholy is found in the historic traditions of death's presence in paradise, the tears of nature, along with nostalgia, pathos, and melancholy's presiding god, Saturn. In contemporary society, melancholy becomes a fashion statement in the emo subculture. This guide finds melancholy within the work of writers such as W. G. Sebald and Jean-Paul Sartre, the art of photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto and multimedia artist Gerhard Richter, the films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Patrick Keiller, the music of Erik Satie and Tom Waits, the architecture and landscapes of ruins, and the 21st century's predilection for memorials.



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