

[PDF] Against Happiness: In Praise Of Melancholy

Eric G. Wilson - pdf download free book



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Description:

From Publishers Weekly This slender, powerful salvo offers a sure-to-be controversial alternative to the recent cottage industry of high-brow happiness books. Wilson, chair of Wake Forest University's English Department, claims that Americans today are too interested in being happy. (He points to the widespread use of antidepressants as exhibit A.) It is inauthentic and shallow, charges Wilson, to relentlessly seek happiness in a world full of tragedy. While he does not want to

romanticize clinical depression, Wilson argues forcefully that melancholia is a necessary ingredient of any culture that wishes to be innovative or inventive. In particular, we need melancholy if we want to make true, beautiful art. Though others have written on the possible connections between creativity and melancholy, Wilson's meditations about artists ranging from Melville to John Lennon are stirring. Wilson calls for Americans to recognize and embrace melancholia, and he praises as bold radicals those who already live with the truth of melancholy. Wilson's somewhat affected writing style is at times distracting: his prose is quirky, and he tends toward alliteration (To be a patriot is to be peppy a person seeking slick comfort in this mysteriously mottled world). Still, beneath the rococo wordsmithing lies provocative cultural analysis. (*Feb.*)

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From Enough with the power of positive thinking, says literature professor and self-confessed melancholic Wilson in this ardent entreaty for the honesty and beauty of gloom. Exasperated by the shallow consumerist contentment pursued by "American happy types," Wilson aches for the roller coaster of intensified feeling and heightened creativity that often arises from the "somber and weird depths of the melancholy imagination." It is thus fitting that his narrative is profoundly turbulent, lurching from bile-spitting condemnations of gated communities and shopping malls to self-absorbed reveries on rusty radiators and rotting leaves, to brilliant, soaring celebrations of melancholic geniuses such as Coleridge and Springsteen (two among many famous melancholic artists noted by the author). But beneath the many trappings of polemic lies the passionate soul of a nineteenth-century romantic who, made wise by encounters with his own personal darkness, invites readers to share his reverence for nature and exuberance for life. Providing a powerful literary complement to recent psychological discussions of melancholy, such as Joshua Wolf Shenk's *Lincoln's Melancholy* (2005), this treatment is variously gloomy and ecstatic, infuriating and even inspiring. --Brendan Driscoll --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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