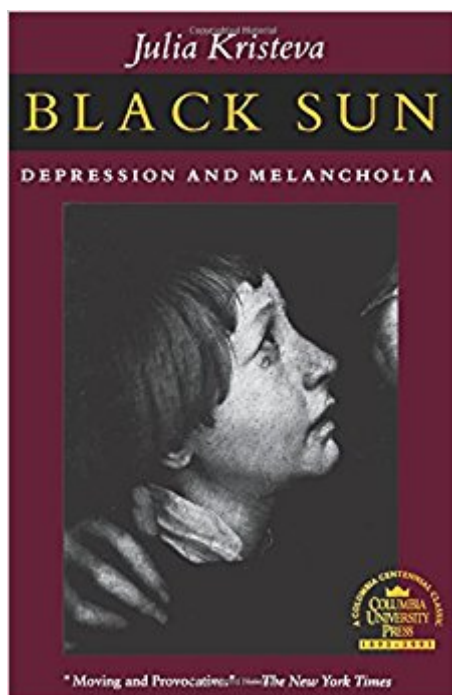


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# Black Sun



## Synopsis

In *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva addresses the subject of melancholia, examining this phenomenon in the context of art, literature, philosophy, the history of religion and culture, as well as psychoanalysis. She describes the depressive as one who perceives the sense of self as a crucial pursuit and a nearly unattainable goal and explains how the love of a lost identity of attachment lies at the very core of depression's dark heart. In her discussion she analyzes Holbein's controversial 1522 painting "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb," and has revealing comments on the works of Marguerite Duras, Dostoyevsky and Nerval. *Black Sun* takes the view that depression is a discourse with a language to be learned, rather than strictly a pathology to be treated.

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## Customer Reviews

Moving and Provocative. (The New York Times)An absorbing meditation on depression and melancholia, moving from essays in psychoanalytic theory based on the 'symptomatology' of Ms. Kristeva's patients to rather more formal studies of depression in Holbein the Younger, Nerval, Dostoyevsky, and Marguerite Duras... A persuasive theory of depression that is both moving and provocative. (The New York Times)When Julia Kristeva's new book, 'Black Sun,' begins seductively, with an elegant reminder of that old black mood we know so well, she raises hopes that the darker moments of depression will be illuminated... Kristeva's descriptions of the artistic working through of melancholica are compelling and theoretically sound. (Voice Literary Supplement)

In *Black Sun*, Julia Kristeva addresses the subject of melancholia, examining this phenomenon in the context of art, literature, philosophy, the history of religion and culture, as well as psychoanalysis. She describes the depressive as one who perceives the sense of self as a crucial pursuit and a nearly unattainable goal and explains how the love of a lost identity of attachment lies at the very core of depression's dark heart. In her discussion she analyzes Holbein's controversial 1522 painting "The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb," and has revealing comments on the works of Marguerite Duras, Dostoyevsky and Nerval. *Black Sun* takes the view that depression is a discourse with a language to be learned, rather than strictly a pathology to be treated.

This is a different approach to depression. Too often, our focus has been on the DSM-IV approach, or to the treatment of depression using selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors such as Prozac and Paxil. Very rarely does somebody, let alone a respected psychoanalyst, attempt to explain what it actually *feels* like to experience major depression. This is a writing that gives meaning to depression, and I feel that it helps people and their families understand the experience of depression. The process of all modalities of psychotherapy involves communication, a dialogue between the therapist and the client. This process draws the client out and is an essential factor in the care of the client. Kristeva emphasizes the "antidepressant qualities of psychoanalysis." While acknowledging the utility of antidepressants in psychotherapy, the function of the linguistic component seeks to emphasize the meaning of the "inconsolable loss" experienced by the depressed patient. To symbolically illustrate the sensation of depression, Kristeva uses great sensitivity in drawing on the poetry of Gerard de Nerval, the novels of Dostoyevsky, and Hans Holbein's picture "Dead Christ." "*Dark Sun*" had meaning to me because of its emphasis on the *individual* and how he or she feels. We must always emphasize the dignity of the individual in dealing with the depressed.

good.

perfect

Kristeva is so good discussing some of my own issues that she ALMOST makes me take psychoanalysis seriously

Kristeva's is definitely worth a read. While staking a claim for the salubrious effects of psychoanalysis, the author freshly details art's engagement with melancholy and depression. The first chapter or two will make rough going for the reader who is not amused by the lexicon of psychoanalysis. But even readers with a literary intolerance of that sort will find the third chapter on feminine depression sensitively written and thoughtfully invested with human presence. The chapters on art and artists with melancholia make generally excellent reading. The most brief of the chapters, "Beauty: The Depressive Other's Realm," provides a soaring inauguration of the author's poetic and psychoanalytic approaches to the madness and melancholia among Durer, Nerval, Dostoevsky, and Duras. The chapter on Duras might not bear a discussion of an author familiar to American readers but it is worth reading because it alone of the chapters explicitly raises questions concerning politics, expectations, madness and depression. The author investigates the sites she has chosen with great sensitivity and radiant intellect. Scattered clouds will be apparent to those who find psychoanalysis an unsatisfying or capricious methodology of investigation.

In much the same way that Philippe Aries took the subject of childhood and illuminated it for all time in "Centuries of Childhood," fellow French writer (although Bulgarian-born) and Lacanian psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva examines depression and melancholia. She comes at it from various angles and filters: fine arts, literature, history, philosophy, religion, and of course psychology. She posits psychoanalysis as a (really THE) 'counterdepressant' -- convincingly. This is great highbrow stuff: chapters with titles like "Beauty, the Depressive's Other Realm," and "Life and Death of Speech." Death, suicide, the inevitable gloom resulting from loss of maternal, later erotic, love; all are insightfully discussed -- even rather tenderly. If you're depressed BLACK SUN won't make you more so -- and if you're feeling okay to begin with, it's a terrific scholarly study.

And she writes beautifully about depression and artists. Not an easy book but an important one. Read it for enlightenment not entertainment.

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