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Sinopsis

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A leading European intellectual reflects on the changing concept of melancholy throughout history. Alberto Manguel praises the Hungarian writer Laszlo Foldenyi as "one of the most brilliant essayists of our time." Foldenyi's extraordinary *Melancholy*, with its profusion of literary, ecclesiastical, artistic, and historical insights, gives proof to such praise. His book, part history of the term melancholy and part analysis of the melancholic disposition, explores many centuries to explore melancholy's ambiguities. Along the way Foldenyi discovers the unrecognized role melancholy may play as a source of energy and creativity in a well-examined life. Foldenyi begins with a tour of the history of the word melancholy, from ancient Greece to the medieval era, the Renaissance, and modern times. He finds the meaning of melancholy has always been ambiguous, even paradoxical. In our own times it may be regarded either as a psychic illness or a mood familiar to everyone. The author analyzes the complexities of melancholy and concludes that its dual nature reflects the inherent tension of birth and mortality. To understand the melancholic disposition is to find entry to some of the deepest questions one's life. This distinguished translation brings Foldenyi's work directly to English-language readers for the first time.