

## **Insomnia: A Cultural History**

Eluned Summers-Bremner

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In today's media-saturated, hyper-connected society, increasing numbers of people are finding it hard to switch off their over-stimulated brains and escape the demands of daily life. We are becoming, it seems, a world of insomniacs but this condition of perpetual unrest has plagued people for centuries. In this fascinating study, Eluned Summers-Bremner shows that the roots and effects of insomnia are complex, and reveals how humans have employed art, science and witchcraft to understand and treat the affliction. Summers-Bremner's exploration of sleeplessness begins with the literature of ancient times, and finds its sufferers in prominent texts such as the "Iliad", the "Odyssey", the Mesopotamian epic "Gilgamesh" and the Bible. Insomnia continued to figure large in Romantic and Gothic literature, as well as the ephemeral worlds of nightmares and the Sublime. Meanwhile, throughout the ages insomnia has been variously categorized by the medical community as a manifestation of a deeper psychological or physical malady. As modern medicine and science evolved, insomnia emerged as a distinct symptom of psychological illness or posttraumatic stress disorder. Today's medical solutions tend to involve prescription drugs, and "Insomnia" raises important questions about the role of the pharmaceutical industry and the effectiveness of such treatments. Bedside reading of the most useful sort, "Insomnia" won't cure your sleeplessness, but it will help you understand the problem and introduce you to its rich cultural antecedents, and to fellow sufferers down the ages.



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