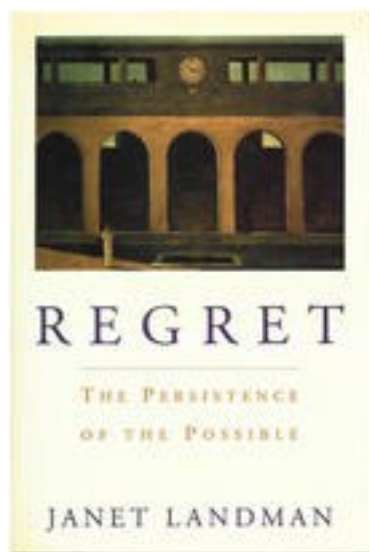


# Regret: The Persistence of the Possible



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From Publishers Weekly

Regret is a painful feeling that we tend to view as an emotional indulgence, writes Landman. Yet, regret over mistakes, missed opportunities, failure or misfortunes can serve constructive ends by spurring us to pragmatic self-improvement or active engagement with the world, she maintains. Despite its stilted academic prose, this thought-provoking study rewards the reader with a wide-angled view of regret as seen through the prism of novels, poems, psychological theory and research, anthropology and decision theory. Using four classic novels--Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which, in Landman's schematic framework exemplify romantic, tragic, comic and ironic worldviews, respectively--she argues that how we experience

regret depends greatly on our personal outlook and cultural values. Landman teaches psychology at the University of Michigan.

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From Kirkus Reviews

A spirited if scholarly examination of the nature of regret. Landman (Psychology/University of Michigan) defines regret as "a more or less painful cognitive and emotive state of feeling sorry for misfortunes, limitations, losses, transgressions, shortcomings, or mistakes." Nothing startling there--but "cognitive" and "emotive" are the keys, since Landman considers regret to be an experience of "felt-reason" or "reasoned-emotion." She analyzes regret through a literary lens, choosing novels that exemplify four different views of regret: the romantic (Dickens's *Great Expectations*); the comic (James's *The Ambassadors*); the tragic (Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*); and the ironic (Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*). She also looks at Anne Tyler's *Breathing Lessons*, which, she says, blends the romantic and ironic. In addition, Landman draws on empirical surveys, philosophy, chaos theory, anthropology, economics, psychology, and even poetry, for she sees regret as a complex, multilayered experience. Among the questions explored are: What sort of experience is regret? Who is most likely to feel it? What causes regret? What role does it play? How is it transformed? Landman's exploration of the role of regret gets involved in theories of decision-making, along with sometimes daunting mathematical formulas, but math-phobes can skip this discussion...without regret. Meanwhile, the author's study of the transformation of regret through a dialectical process requires careful reading but is central to her view of regret as concept and experience. Landman favors a romantic-ironic view that acknowledges regret's force; recognizes the inevitability of conflict, loss, limits, and mistakes; and remains alert to contradictions and ambiguities. Erudite, intense, and intellectually demanding. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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