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THE IDEA OF NOSTALGIA

In tracing the history of emotions and of mentalities, one is immediately confronted with a question of method resulting from the interplay of emotions and language.

The emotions whose history we wish to retrace are accessible to us only from the time when they find expression, verbally or by other means. For the critic, for the historian, an emotion exists only beyond the point at which it attains a linguistic status. No facet of an emotion can be traced before it is named, before it is designated and expressed. It is not, then, the emotion itself which comes before us; only that part which has passed into a given form of expression can be of interest to the historian.

An emotion can attach itself to a word (especially to a word in fashion), but this does not occur without rather important consequences. On the one hand, as soon as the name of an emotion is brought to light, the word, through its very efficacy, helps to fix, to propagate, to generalize the emotion which it represents. Emotion is not a word, but it can only be spread abroad through words. At one extreme, and when certain words

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are at the height of their power, they reach a point where they include elements which have little relation to that word. La Rochefoucauld said forcefully and simply: "There are people who would never have been in love if they had never heard tell of love." During the First World War, André Gide noticed that the language of the journalists (who had not been at the front) furnished the clichés which the soldiers returning from the front used to describe their feelings. Nowadays, the language of psychoanalysis presents us with a *model* permitting us to understand the significance of our emotions; it proposes a form for them. Although simply "applied" to inner experience, this form does not remain dissociated from it for long; the verbalization of emotion is intertwined with the structure of that which is experienced. The history of emotions, then, can not be anything other than the history of those words in which the emotion is expressed. The task of the historian in this domain is connected with that of the philologist: he must be able to recognize the diverse stages of language, the style and modality through which an experience (individual or collective) has found expression. This leads us in the direction of historical semantics.

In this outline of a history of nostalgia, I shall endeavor to let these antiquated languages speak for themselves, and I shall refrain from interrogating these documents from the perspective of contemporary psychology. At most, I shall proceed in this manner only occasionally and as a last resort. I should like to let the obsolete (but original) voice of a psychology which is no longer our own be heard. We shall see that this psychology made use of a quite coherent language, no less acceptable (in the context of its age) than the systematic explanations of modern psychology are to us. This leaves the impression that, given the relative imperfection of this science, its language is also threatened with obsolescence. Thus, we have another reason not to make it the final arbiter. For, in this case, revision would become rapidly necessary.

Of course, nothing prevents us from applying the knowledge which we have at our disposal today to an exploration of the past, to an analysis of the emotions of man of another age. We have the right to speak of the *sadism* of Nero, just as we have the right to measure the radio-active carbon in prehistoric chipped

stones. Only we must not forget that the word sadism, to the same extent as the Geiger-counter, forms part of our modern intellectual equipment. It is a vocable which the exegetist has at his disposition; it is not a reality which is pre-existent to its designation. Here, again, it is necessary to take the instrumental function of the word into account.

Whatever our desire to attain the reality of the past may be, we have no other recourse than to that of the language of our age in order to establish what is to be the learning of our time. But it is one thing to interpret the emotions of eighteenth-century men in our own way, and another to pay attention to the way in which they themselves interpreted their emotions. Historical distance, which gives to the past its quality of pastness, must be respected as far as possible. In our desire to project, without precaution, the ideas which are familiar to us today, we amalgamate languages which should remain separate, we create a false present out of the past, and we make it impossible to respect the unavoidable gap between our system of interpretation and that which is subjected to it. We lose sight of the operational and conjectural character of the interpretation, thus amalgamating the interpretation and its object. Inevitably, we speak the language of our time; it is possible, however, to avoid attributing the tenor of our present emotional states to men who lived in the past, to avoid confusing the voices which call upon us from elsewhere and the tone of voice of our own interpretation.

This is not in any way to over-rate the elusive, the unobjectifiable "object" of our search. We can never recapture the subjective experiences of an eighteenth-century man as they were. We can only try not to attribute our problems and our "complexes" to him too unknowingly. We can kindly grant him the attention due to a foreigner, to an inhabitant of a distant country whose customs and language are different and must be learned patiently.

For sociologists since Montesquieu, these are first principles. It does not seem to be the same for the majority of psychologists, who have been too inclined at all times and in all places to rediscover the behavioral patterns which they have observed and theorized upon. The history of the theories of *nostalgia* will not be useless if it is capable of dislocating us somewhat, it

it compels us to observe the distances which have been poorly apprehended up to now.

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In the first place, we have to deal with the actual creation of a disease; for, historically, the word *nostalgia* was coined for the express purpose of translating a particular feeling (*Heimweh, regret, desiderium patriae*) into medical terminology.[1] The fact that exiles languished and wasted away far from their native land was not an original observation in the year 1688, when Johannes Hofer, of Mulhouse, defended his thesis on nostalgia.[2] The novelty was in the attention which the candidate paid to it, in his effort to convert this emotional phenomenon into a medical phenomenon, exposing it, in so doing, to rational inquiry. At this time, when, in medicine, doctors were beginning to carry out an inventory and a classification of disease, and thus, in imitation of the system established in botany, to set up a table of the *genera morborum,* it was necessary to be on the watch for varieties which might enrich the repertory. Medical tradition was very familiar with melancholic love; it was capable of describing in detail the symptoms and symptomatic lesions provoked by the loss of a lover. But this same tradition had never formulated the possibility of any difficulties arising as a result of a temporary separation from one's normal surroundings. The strength of this tradition was so great that the medical interpretation of the *desiderium patriae* was slow to arrive, however close it was to the love-melancholy. Was it not, in both cases, simply a matter of the extreme effects of unhappiness?

Before they are recognized as abnormal conditions, certain diseases are seen as simple disturbances within the normal course of life, disturbances which no one thinks of distinguishing as of medical importance. As long as the patient does not think of summoning the aid of a doctor, as long as medical terminology

[1] Fritz Ernst has written the most complete history of the idea of nostalgia (*Vom Heimweh*, Zurich, 1949); the thesis of Fortunata Rammings-Thön (*Das Heimweh*, Zurich, 1958) contains some important developments.

[2] *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia,* Basel, 1688. An English translation is given in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* Baltimore, II (1934), p. 379.

does not possess any term with which to designate it, the disease does not exist. It is scarcely a paradox to state that these diseases exist as diseases only as a result of the attention which is paid them.

The attention which Johannes Hofer gave to *Heimweh* was decisive. First, he thought it proper to find a Greek word for it, as it was necessary in 1688 for a disease, originally designated by a common noun, to be invested with the appropriate classical trappings. Hofer had a happy touch: with the words *return* (νόστος) and *sorrow* (ἄλγος), he created *nostalgia*; a word which has had such success that we have completely forgotten its origin. The term nostalgia is so familiar to us that we conceive of its recent and very scholarly origin only with great difficulty. This pedantic neologism has been so well accepted that it has finally lost its original medical sense and has blended into our ordinary speech. It was late in entering the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*: 1835. Its success has, in the end, robbed it of all its technical significance; it has become a literary term, thus vague. This is often the fate of those vocables which are used to designate the mental disease in vogue at a give time. The same fate has overtaken the word *melancholy* (which was so overworked that nineteenth-century psychiatrists distrusted it) and may shortly overtake the word *schizophrenia*, another Swiss-made neologism.

As a result of the thesis of Johannes Hofer, the *Heimweh* became a part of accepted nosology. This disease, of provincial origin, was about to attain universal recognition: students were to hold forth on the subject, to defend other propositions on its cause and effects. Henceforth, the nostalgic individual was justified in waiting upon the opinion of the enlightened Profession, and no longer on the risky advice of friends and empiricists. Moreover, this mental disease, which had until this time been limited to common souls such as mercenaries and country-folk newly transplanted to the city, was about to take advantage of the approval of the Profession, eventually to penetrate to the educated classes themselves. Aware of this, eager to prevent it, these men brought the curse down upon themselves and transmitted it to others through their very fears. We know that there are diseases—that is, nervous or "mental" disease, neuroses or even psychoses—which are transmitted because people talk about them. Conver-

sation sets the mind to work and in this way serves as the contaminating agent. At the end of the eighteenth century people began to be fearful of extended sojourns away from home because they had become conscious of the threat posed by nostalgia. People even died of nostalgia after having read in books that nostalgia is a disease which is frequently mortal.[3] For the doctor who observed the death of a little Savoyard in Paris, the diagnosis was evident. This was, indeed, a strange century, in which the English in order to cure their spleen, fled their native air in search of the tranquil air of the South—while others believed that they were risking death simply by going away from their familiar countryside. Of course, in addition to these contradictory theories, one must recognize the relevance of the conditions under which the individual left his native land. It was one thing to leave willingly, having freely chosen one's itinerary and the length of one's stay, and another to be forced to leave, faced with the prospects of a subordinate and monotonous life. From the seventeenth century on, this was the fate of the Swiss soldier serving in foreign lands;[4] it was equally the fate of the English sailors who were impressed into the service of the Navy:[5] *calenture*, the nautical variant of nostalgia, was caused by the combined effects of the tropical sun and homesickness.[6]

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In his interpretation, Johannes Hofer made use of the classic

[3] This conviction persisted in the nineteenth century. Balzac wrote from Milan to Madame Hanska: "Dear, I suffer homesickness... I come and go without any spirit, without being able to say what I have, and if I remained this way for two weeks, I should die" (May 23, 1838). In 1868, Madame Aupick related the circumstances of a voyage which Charles Baudelaire took in 1841 to the South Seas: "Fearing that he might be attacked by this merciless disease, *nostalgia,* whose effects are, at times, so deadly, the captain urged him to accompany him to Saint-Denis (Bourbon)." W.T. Bandy and Claude Pichois, *Baudelaire devant ses contemporains,* Monaco, 1957, p. 51.

[4] Cf. Richard Feller, "Alliances et service mercenaire" in *Histoire militaire de la Suisse,* Bern, 1916, Vol. II, Part III.

[5] Cf. J.G. Zimmermann, *Von der Erfahrung in der Arzneykunst,* revised edition, Zurich, 1787, p. 556.

[6] In his *Zoonomia,* Erasmus Darwin gives calenture as a synonym for nostalgia. This emotion figures among the "diseases of volition," between *amor sui* and *spes religiosa.*

notion of the *imaginatio laesa*. His description of nostalgia is related to the psychosomatic medicine of the Greco-Roman tradition. If some of the terms which he used cause one to think of the influence of Thomas Willis, others send one back to the old masters, Aretaius of Cappadocia, Galen, etc. Hofer states:

> Nostalgia is born from a disorder of the imagination, from which it follows that the nervous sap always takes the very same direction in the brain and, as a result, excites the very same idea, the desire to return to one's native land... The nostalgic are affected by but few external objects, and nothing surpasses the impression which the desire to return makes on them: while in a normal state the soul can become equally interested in all objects, in nostalgia its attention is diminished; it feels the attraction of very few objects and practically limits itself to one single idea. I should willingly admit that melancholy plays a part here, for the vital spirits, worn out by the single idea which occupies them, become exhausted and provoke erroneous representations.

Why, Johannes Hofer asked himself, are the young Swiss so frequently inclined to nostalgia when they go abroad? Obviously because many of them have never left home before, have never been forced to establish themselves within a foreign *milieu*. It is hard for them to forget the loving care with which their mothers surrounded them. They miss the soups which they used to have for breakfast, the thick milk from their own valley, and perhaps also the freedom which they enjoyed in their own country... The modern psychiatrist should be thankful to Johannes Hofer for underlining straight off the role of this deprivation: the loss of childhood, of "oral satisfactions," of motherly coaxing.

But, as Fritz Ernst has justly pointed out, this theory did not pass without giving rise to objections from the contemporaries or the immediate successors of Hofer, especially from those who were possessed of a strong patriotic nature. Does the attribution of nostalgia to a psychological cause of this sort not imply an excessive cowardliness on the part of the Swiss youth? Does this not undermine the just reknown of a vigorous, free, strong and courageous race? To defend the national honor Jean-Jacques Scheuchzer, from Zurich, proposed, in 1705 and 1719, a comple-

tely mechanical explanation of nostalgia.[7] The scientific fashion, after Borelli and Hoffmann, was iatromechanics and "systematic" medicine: diseases were explained, in a manner more speculative than empiric, by means of the laws which control the inanimate bodies of the physical world; the science of the time authorized the search for the physical causes of psychic disturbances. This discussion continued throughout the century; in the end, two hypotheses were simultaneously accepted: a psychological influence on the physical and an influence of the body on the soul. We can see this from the titles of the works of J.P. Marat and of Cabanis, among many others: *On Man: the Principles and Laws of the Influence of the Soul on the Body and of the Body on the Soul,*[8] and *Correspondences between the Physical and the Moral Elements in Man.*[9]

Recourse to a physical explanation gave Scheuchzer the occasion to vindicate the Swiss character. For him, the necessary interplay of physical causes did not afford an opportunity for criticism. He was convinced that nostalgia was a question of atmospheric pressure. The Swiss live in the highest mountains of Europe. They breathe, they incorporate a light, subtle and rarified air. On descending to the plain, their bodies must undergo an increased pressure, the effect of which is all the greater because the air inside them "which we have brought with us") offers less resistance. On the other hand, a Dutchman, born and brought up on the plain, carries within a heavy air which easily resists the pressure of the dense fog which surrounds him. At sea-level, the poor Swiss are overcome by the atmospheric pressure; their blood circulates with difficulty in their small cutaneous arteries; the young suffer more because of the very suppleness of their fibres, which, for this reason, are more easily compressed. Thus, the heart, on receiving less blood becomes depressed and consequently saddened. People lose sleep and appetite; soon they are overcome by a hot or a cold fever which is often fatal. What are the

[7] J.J. Scheuchzer, *Naturgeschichte des Schweizerlandes,* 1705, and re-edited several times during the century. The work of Ernst Fritz contains some extracts.

[8] J.P. Marat, *De l'homme ou des principes et des lois de l'influence de l'âme sur le corps, et du corps sur l'âme,* Amsterdam, 1775.

[9] P.J.G. Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, Paris, 1802.

possible remedies? If one can not send the sick person back home, release the soldier, or simply inspire him with the hope of returning, the most logical treatment consists in quartering him on a hill or in a tower, where he can breathe lighter air. Medications containing "compressed air," saltpeter, prepared nitre, or nitre spirits work with equal success. Beer and new wine, both rich in light matter, are salutary.

At the same time, Scheuchzer's explanation accounts for the favorable effect of the Swiss climate. Is Switzerland not, after all, the *asylum languentium*? Does one not see people filled with heavy air hastening from all parts of Europe to recuperate in our mountains? In the eulogy which Scheuchzer pronounces on the subject of light air, one catches the first intimations of the future hotel prospectus: for it is only in this country that the ducts of the body become dilated, circulation improves, all the juices are gently put in motion. We need not laugh at this: having proposed a physical explanation, Scheuchzer had no other language at his disposal than that of the barometrics and of the hydrostatics of his age. The bio-physical explanation was nothing other than the application of the "patterns" and theories acquired through physical experimentation to the internal workings of living beings. Certain commentators, such as abbé Du Bos[10] and Albert von Haller,[11] found no objection to Scheuchzer's theories. But things changed; iatromechanics lost its hold. The vitalism of Montpellier, the theories of the Edinburgh School[12] concerning nervous activity gave new life to those explanations which put the blame on the *idée fixe,* on sorrow. In the unified whole which the network of nerves binds to the brain, there is no *idée fixe*, no lasting sorrow which will not, in the long run, give rise to organic lesions.

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Nostalgia is an emotional upheaval which is related to the work-

[10] J.B. Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture,* revised edition, Utrecht, 1732, pp. 137-39.

[11] A. von Haller, *Relation d'un voyage de Albert de Haller dans l'Oberland Bernois,* ed. H. Pettrier (1906). Quoted by Ernst.

[12] W. Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic,* London, 1791. This work contains a broad definition of neurosis.

ings of memory. It is not surprising that these men applied the associationist theory of memory to nostalgia, especially as certain facts relative to the circumstances which cause an attack of nostalgia could pass as particularly eloquent examples of the law of the association of ideas.

In 1710, in a Latin dissertation, Theodor Zwinger,[13] of Basel, mentioned the appearance of a curious and intense nostalgic condition whenever the Swiss soldiers serving in France and Belgium heard a "certain rustic cantilena, to which the Swiss drive their herds to pasture in the Alps." This *Kühe-Reyhen*, this *ranz-des-vaches* had the power to revive sad recollections of their native land. And this was especially detrimental to those whose blood had already been altered by the change of air, or for those naturally inclined to sadness. This is why, Zwinger asserts, when faced with the disastrous effects of these tunes, the officers considered themselves forced to prohibit them and to punish those who persisted in playing, singing or even whistling them, with the utmost severity. Burning fevers presented little difficulty: it was desertion which formed the most serious problem. For the captains who themselves equipped their men, sometimes at great expense, a desertion represented the loss of part of the capital invested. It was necessary to do everything possible to reduce the influence of this *idée fixe* which incited one either to return home or to die. The legend was firmly established: if the nostalgic individual is not saved by obtaining leave, or does not manage to escape, he will commit suicide, he will seek out death at the first opportunity. In 1700, in a chapter devoted to military medicine, Ramazzini[14] cited a splendid and forceful dictum which was in circulation throughout the armies: *Qui patriam quaerit, mortem invenit*. All this as a result of a popular tune, of a little phrase which had the unusual power to provoke an attack of emotional hypermnesia: the illusion of a sort of presence of the past, all the more pervasive owing to the sadness caused by departing.

Here was something which definitely confirmed and illustrated the assertion of Malebranche that "the imprints of the brain are

[13] "De Pothopatridalgia," in *Fasciculus dissertationum medicarum selectiorum*, Basel, 1710. Extracts given by Ernst.

[14] B. Ramazzini, *De morbis artificum diatriba*, Mantua, 1700.

so well interconnected that they can never be reawakened without awakening all those which were impressed at the same time." One might also turn to Locke[15] and Hutcheson:[16] they demonstrated how the association of ideas gives rise to phobias and to preconceptions by tying an idea and an accidental occurrence so closely together that every repetition of that occurrence necessarily revives the idea related to it. It is this deterministic consequence of association which prevents reason from imposing a stabilizing control. Hartley proposed a theory of complex ideas; it is only necessary that one element of this complex be evoked in order to reactivate those which are associated with it.

When a variety of ideas are associated together, the visible idea, being more glaring and distinct than the rest, performs the office of symbol to all the rest, suggests them, and connects them together. In this, it somewhat resembles the first letter of a word, or the first word of a sentence, which are often made use of to bring all the rest to mind.

When words have acquired any considerable power of exciting pleasant or painful vibrations in the nervous system, by being often associated with such things as do this, they may transfer a part of these pleasures and pains upon indifferent things, by being at other times often associated with such. This is one of the principal sources of the several factitious pleasures and pains of human life.[17]

These associated recollections can attain a degree of intensity comparable to that of actual feeling. This is no longer a "miniature vibration" which takes place in our "medullary substance," "but vivid ones, equal to those excited by objects impressed on the senses." (I.II.14).

Later, John Gregory put forth an explanation of the phenomena of affective and of involuntary memory. In a work published in 1765, he stated:

The different passions naturally express themselves by different

[15] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* 1690.

[16] F. Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections,* London, 1728, IV. 93.

[17] D. Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty and his Expectations,* London, 1749, I.II.12 (cor. 7), III.I.80 (cor. 5).

sounds; but this expression seems capable of a considerable latitude... When particular sounds and a certain strain of melody are impressed upon young minds, in a uniform connection with certain passions expressed in a song, this regular association raises these sounds, in progress of time, into a kind of natural and expressive language of the passions. Melody therefore is to be considered, in a certain degree, as a relative thing, founded in the particular associations and habits of different people; and, by custom, like language, annexed to their sentiments and passions. We generally hear with pleasure the music we have been accustomed to in our youth, because it awakens the memory of our guiltless and happy days. We are even sometimes wonderfully affected with airs, that neither appears, to ourselves nor to others, to have any particular expression. The reason is, we have first heard these airs at a time when our minds were so deeply affected by some passion, as to give a tincture to every object that presented itself at the same time; and though the passion and the cause of it are entirely forgot, yet an object that has once been connected with them, will often awake the emotion, though it cannot recall to remembrance the original cause of it.

Similar associations are formed, by the appropriations, in a great measure accidental, which different notions have given to particular musical instruments, as bells, drums, trumpets, and organs; in consequence of which they excite ideas and passions in some which they do not in others.[18]

In his *Dictionary of Music,* Rousseau made use of a similar theory in order to account for the effects of the *ranz-des-vaches*:

We shall seek in vain to find in this air any energic accents capable of producing such astonishing effects. These effects, which are void in regard to strangers, come alone from custom, reflections, and a thousand circumstances, which, retraced by those who hear them, and recalling the idea of their country, their former pleasures, their youth, and all their joys of life, excite in them a bitter sorrow for the loss of them. The music does not in this case act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign.[19]

The tune, a fragment of the past, strikes our senses, but it also

[18] J. Gregory, *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with those of the Animal World,* London, 1777 (7th ed.), pp. 164-66.

[19] J.-J. Rousseau, *Dictionary of Music,* trans. W. Waring and J. French, London, n.d. (c. 1778), p. 267.

revives in the imagination all our former life and all the "associated" images with which it is connected. This "memorative sign" is related to a partial presence which causes one to experience, with pleasure and pain, the imminence and the impossibility of complete restoration of this universe which emerges fleetingly from oblivion. Roused by the "memorative sign," the conscience comes to be haunted by an image of the past which is at once definite and unattainable. The image of childhood reappears through a melody, only to slip away, leaving us a prey to this "passion du souvenir" which Mme de Staël saw as "the most disquieting sorrow that can take possession of the soul."

For the theorists of the time, the key to this associationist magic was the sense of hearing. This is not simply a question of music; the bubbling of springs and the murmuring of streams are endowed with a similar power. And Albert von Haller, in an article rejecting his early mechanistic hypotheses,[20] cited the role of certain inflections of the voice. The presence of paramnesia and of faulty auditory correlations constitutes the first sign of illness: "One of the earliest symptoms is the sensation of hearing the voice of a person that one loves in the voice of another with whom one is conversing, or to see one's family again in dreams."

Exile, alpine music, sad, tender recollections, golden visions of childhood: this conjunction of themes leads not only to an "acoustical" theory of nostalgia; it also leads to the formation of the romantic theory of music and even to the definition of romanticism. I shall not at this time inventory the great amount of poetry (great mainly in quantity) to which nostalgia and the *ranz-des-vaches* gave rise. We should, however, recall at least several lines of the *Pleasures of Memory* (1792), by Samuel Rogers:

> The intrepid Swiss, who guards a foreign shore,
> If chance he hears the song so sweet, so wild,
> His heart would spring to hear it when a child,
> Melts at the long-lost scenes that round him rise,
> And sinks a martyr to repentant sighs.[21]

[20] Article on *Nostalgia* in the *Supplément* to the *Encyclopédie*

[21] S. Rogers, "The Pleasures of Memory," 1792. Also, several lines from

It fell to Senancour to contradict Rousseau by denying that the effect of the *ranz-des-vaches* is the result of accidental association: he found that this music was not at all insignificant in itself; it was rather the most accurate way to give expression to the sublimity of the mountains. What the shepherds discovered in the Alps was the voice of nature.

> It is in sounds that nature has put the strongest expression of the romantic character; it is especially through the sense of hearing that extraordinary places and things become easily yet emphatically perceptible... The voice of one's beloved is more lovely than her features; the sounds emanating from a sublime place make a deeper, more lasting impression than its forms. I have never seen a picture of the Alps which could make them as real as an alpine melody can... The *ranz-des-vaches* not only recalls memories, it paints... If its expression is more true than sophisticated, the very first sounds put us in the high valleys, near the naked, reddish-gray rocks, beneath the cold sky and the burning sun... One is impressed with the slowness of things and with the grandeur of the place.[22]

One can find echoes of these pages in the work of Liszt.

For the Romantics, nostalgia was a disease which could neither be cured nor assuaged. In the eighteenth century, doctors stated plainly that it would be cured by returning to one's native land. This was too simple. The nostalgic did not stop eating his heart out; the wound did not heal. In his *Anthropologie,* Kant has given a subtle interpretation to this irrational desire: what a person wishes to recover is not so much the actual *place* where he passed his childhood but his youth itself. He is not straining toward someting which he can repossess, but toward an age which is forever beyond his reach.[23] Back in his native land, he is still unhappy, for he finds that people and things no longer

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"L'imagination" (1788) of Abbé Delille (Chant IV, "L'imagination des lieux"):

> Ainsi les souvenirs, les regrets et l'amour,
> Et la mélancolique et douce rêverie,
> Reviennent vers les lieux chers à l'âme attendrie,
> Où nous fûmes enfans, amans, aimés, heureux.

[22] Senancour, *Obermann,* Letter XXXVIII, Third Fragment.

[23] Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht,* 1798, I. XXXII.

conform to his idea of what they used to be. His childhood is not given back to him. Before Rimbaud said, "One does not leave," Kant had warned that there is no returning.

The literature of nostalgia has furnished the ready-made formulae, the grandiose commonplaces with which the alienated members of the romantic middle-class were preoccupied; at the same time, intermingled with the themes which we have just mentioned, the Platonic themes concerning the celestial home and the terrestrial exile reappear. This painful experience, provoked by the uprooting of the conscience from its familiar surroundings, became the metaphorical expression of a much more profound rupture, the separation of man from the ideal. But here we must listen to the lesson of Goethe: the figure of Mignon, which he presented in *Wilhelm Meister*, is the best-conceived, the most musical of all representations of nostalgia. The hero comes to know its power of seduction and of destruction; in his full development, he gains from painful experience. He learns what natural love and deep attachments are worth and lives in accordance with this knowledge.

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By the end of the eighteenth century, throughout all the countries of Europe, all doctors recognized nostalgia as a frequently fatal disease; they were agreed that all peoples and all social classes were vulnerable to it, from Lapps in Greenland to Negroes serving in slavery. And the great national armies which called recruits to arms from the most remote provinces were often confronted by this dreadful disease, "homesickness." One example among others (reported by the historian Marcel Reinhard) is sufficient to show how very seriously nostalgia was taken and how much it was feared.

The eighteenth of November, 1793, under alarming political and military circumstances, the adjutant to the Minister of War, Jourdeuil, informed the general at the head of the Northern Army of decisions which were intended to galvanize the forces and to keep them up to total strength. The suppression of leaves for convalescence was included among the harsh measures, with one exception, which provides matter

for thought: leave will be granted exceptionally if the sick person is attacked by "nostalgia or homesickness." The disease must have been considered a serious complaint if, in this situation, it justified such an exception.[24]

An army doctor, Boisseau, gave the reason: "Any soldier who is deeply affected must be given leave before one of his organs is irremediably damaged. In taking this just action, one saves for the nation a citizen who would not have made a good fighter."[25] Other doctors were, of course, less radical: for them, it was sufficient to lure him with bright prospects of returning home in order to cure him, and, in this way, to make the granting of leave unnecessary. Others thought that they could obtain excellent results by multiplying the number of bands, entertainers, story-tellers, the professional *lustig*. Only a minority reccommended hospitalization and bleeding (but with the filth and disorder of the hospitals of the time, this only accelerated the fatal outcome). Finally, a few recommended strong-arm tactics, methods which doctors before Pinel used in the treatment of mental illness. In a book entitled *The Health of Mars,* which appeared in 1790, Dr. Jourdan Le Cointe proposed Draconian measures: nostalgia can be defeated by inciting pain or terror. One should tell the nostalgic soldier that a "red-hot iron applied to his abdomen" will cure him immediately. A Russian general did precisely this, in 1733, at a time when, having ventured into Germany, his army had fallen a prey to nostalgia: "he had it announced that the first to be sick would be buried alive. This punishment was carried out the day after on two or three, with the result that there was no longer a single case in the entire army."

The great problem was to distinguish the truly homesick from the malingerer. For the individual who did not succeed in acclimatizing himself to military life and its dangers, it was hard not to think of contracting an illness which was the only *legal* way to escape from an intolerable situation. In the case of the real nostalgic, the disease, stimulated by fear and the example of

[24] Marcel Reinhard, "Nostalgie et service militaire pendant la Révolution," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 1958, No. I.

[25] *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, article on *Nostalgie* (by Boisseau and Pinel).

others, already represented a given behavior, a search for refuge. How, then, could one distinguish voluntary nostalgia from that which is not? The problem is similar to that which confronted doctors at the end of the nineteenth century who attempted to distinguish cases of paralysis which were clearly feigned from those which normally accompanied hysteria—a pathological behavior, a form of expression which does not, however, originate at the level of the will. For the doctors of the *Grande Armée,* there were a certain number of clear signs which made it possible to ferret out the cheats: they did not have alterations of the pulse, a glassy look in the eye, the disastrous loss of weight which figured among the symptoms of the disease.

But, here, it is necessary to present a rough sketch of clinical nostalgia, that is, of all the manifestations of the disease which, around 1800, led doctors to the diagnosis of nostalgia. I borrow the following from Philippe Pinel's description:

> The principal symptoms lie in a sad, melancholy appearance, a bemused look, eyes at times haggard, countenance at times lifeless, a general disgust, an indifference toward everything; the pulse is slow and weak; at other times, rapid, but scarcely perceptible: a rather constant torpor; while asleep, several phrases are released with sobs and tears; the near impossibility of getting out of bed, a obstinate silence, the rejection of food and drink; emaciation, marasmus and death. The disease is not carried to the last degree in all cases; but if it is not directly mortal, it becomes so indirectly. A few have sufficient strength to overcome it; for a few others, the disease lasts longer and thus extends their stay in the hospital; but this extended stay is almost always mortal, for sooner or later they are stricken by the diseases which permeate, in a frightful way, the military hospitals, such as dysentery, remittent fevers and fevers accompanied with loss of strength and ataxia.[26]

As one can see, in its simple form, nostalgia is a mental disease which can by itself lead to death; in its complicated form, intercurrent diseases accelerate the unhappy patient's end. In point of fact, at the end of the eighteenth century, doctors gave an importance to psychological causes at least equal to that which our most

[26] *Ibid.*

radical psychosomaticians give it. For Pinel, for Baron Larry, for Percy and their numerous followers, the obsession provoked lesions or cerebral irritations, and these, in turn (by virtue of the "solidist" theories which state that the nervous system is master of all the phenomenon of life) immediately caused the most varied organic lesions. As of Percy and Laurent,[27] "the brain and the epigastrium are affected simultaneously. The first concentrates all its forces on a single order of ideas, on a single thought; the second becomes the seat of noxious pressures, of spasmodic constrictions." But, according to Bégin,[28] this "persevering encephalic excitation" has the capacity to "react not only upon the epigastrium, but upon all the principal viscera, "which are affected *sympathetically.*" According to these medical theories—doctors still had no knowledge of infectious agents—all the inflammatory states of meningitis, all the lesions of gastro-enteritis and of pleurisy discovered during autopsy of victims of nostalgia were interpreted as nostalgia.

Auenbrugger, the inventor of sounding by percussion, has described the effects of nostalgia in the following noteworthy terms:

> The body wastes, while all ideas are concentrated on a useless aspiration, and while an area of the lungs responds to percussion with a dull sound. I have opened numerous cadavers of patients who had died of this disease, and I have discovered in all cases that the lungs adhered tightly to the pleura of the thorax, that the tissue of the lobe corresponding to the dullness presented a callous thickening, and a purulence more or less evident.[29]

In reading these lines, one is given the impression that, in the *imagination* of the doctor, everything happened as if there was a secret and binding affinity between the dull state of mind, the spiritual gloominess of the patient, and the unresponsiveness of the thorax. The very same darkening comes to obfuscate the

[27] Article on *Nostalgie,* in *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales,* Paris, 1819, Vol. XXXVI.

[28] Article on *Nostalgie,* in *Dictionnaire de médicine et de chirurgie pratique,* 1834, Vol. XII.

[29] Leopold Auenbrugger, *Inventum Novum,* 1761. Quoted by Ernst.

thoughts and the lungs of the nostalgic person; dullness of the lungs is the concrete representation of the destruction of the mind.

For us, this is clearly a case of tuberculosis, and we should be tempted to say that the changes of character and of humor are, in reality, the consequences of tuberculosis, and not its cause. At any rate, this is what doctors thought at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result of progress made in pathological anatomy and in bacteriology, little by little nostalgia lost the important status which doctors of the Romantic era had given it; and simultaneously, as a military regime was established which was less harsh, as sailors received better treatment, as pay became more substantial, as bodily punishment was applied less frequently, the statistics of the English and French military hospitals revealed a progressive diminution in the number of cases of nostalgia. With a few exceptions: the soldiers of the expeditionary corps, the first European colonials in Algeria...

However, in 1873, the Academy of Medicine awarded a prize to a military doctor, August Haspel,[30] for his very unusual dissertation on nostalgia. One can perhaps regard this as a rearguard action in defence of the psychosomatic tendency of the old school. But one can also discover here a language which, in many respects, heralds the psychosomatic school of the twentieth century. Haspel urges us to regard the disease as a whole; he wants us to start with an understanding of the mind of the patient and to search for its true etiology at the level of the emotions because of the fact that this etiology is capable of producing manifold and profond organic repercussions:

> Nostalgia is a vicious manifestation of a disturbed existence, which is under the influence of an attack by the emotional and ethical part of the individual, that is, of his character... These disturbances, these organic changes have not come about all alone, they have not occurred by themselves in the state in which we ordinarily see them; they have had a beginning; there is, therefore, something which has preceded them, which has introduced them, and this something is definitely the sad thought, the unhappy state of the soul which has determined these organic modifications—which do not, of themselves, make up the cause of the disease, but only one of its anatomical expressions. It

[30] *Mémoires de l'Académie de Médecine,* XXX, 1871-73.

is in nostalgia that we find the earliest initial and essential factor, what we might call the pathological backbone; that is to say, that nothing began before it and that it is, at the very beginning, all the disease.

But, at that date, Haspel was fighting for a lost cause. Scientific discoveries were leading elsewhere. With bacteriology and pathological anatomy well established, Haspel's ideas, had they been heard, would only have had a retarding effect. At this time, they had a reactionary significance. For the medicine of 1873, there was more to be gained from the methods (so sharply criticized by Haspel) of morcellation of the whole human being, of an analysis, of an examination of isolated organs. Even if Haspel was correct in stating that one was not recapturing the psychological *primum movens* of the disease, it was better not to listen to him. In chasing after bacilli, there was less risk of being taken in by mere words, even if one lost sight of the unity of the sick peerson, the "historical," individual character of the disease (with which modern medicine is more concerned).

In the meantime, clinical methods have taught us to recognize a variety of factors more easily: the importance of constitutional factors, the transmission of psychological upheavals, relayed by the neurovegetative or hormonal system, and the role of the microbic and toxic agents which are added.

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Though banished from the manuals of clinical medicine, nostalgia did not cease to be of interest to science. Certainly, around 1900, no one took the theory of its organic repercussions very seriously, but there is a domain in which the concept of nostalgia has been maintained: psychiatry. When a young *montagnard* wastes away in Paris, we should hardly consider the psychological causes of his condition; we should examine his lungs and discover a tubercular condition. But if he sets fire to the shop where he works, or if he attempts suicide, we should look for a psychological explanation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Swiss and the Germans made a variety of studies, analyzing the reaction of adolescents whose appearance frequently corresponded to that

of a "raptus" or of a reaction in short-circuit; they tried to isolate the importance of the various factors: the severity of environmental repression, the psychological defects of the patient (mental deficiency, epilepsy), the specific characteristics of the original *milieu* from which the patient had been isolated. To give one example of this kind of research, I shall mention the thesis of Dr. Karl Jaspers: *Heimweh und Verbrechen* (Nostalgia and Criminality). The work dates from 1909.

The word reappeared, sporadically, in the psychiatric literature which, after 1945, was consecrated to the mental disturbances caused by life in prison- and refugee-camps, but, today, the technical use of nostalgia is extremely rare. We can be sure that it will soon disappear. In current usage, its acquired poetic meaning has little by little taken on a pejorative connotation: the word implies the useless yearning for a world or for a way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed.

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In psychiatry, several concepts have taken the place of nostalgia. They correspond, on the one hand, to a determined effort to analyze the behavior of nostalgic people. On the other hand, they have radically modified the very idea of the disease. The emphasis has changed. We no longer speak of disease but of reaction; we no longer underline the desire to return but, on the contrary, the failure of adaptation. When we speak of "depressive reactions of social maladjustment," the name given to the phenomenon has ceased to designate a place and a history, as in the case of nostalgia; we no longer follow the hypothesis that repatriation will result in a cure. We emphasize, rather, the lack of adaptation to the new society which the individual must live in. The theory of nostalgia put the accent on the original environment (on the *Heim*); the theory of inadaptation accentuates the paramount necessity of reintegration into an existing *milieu*. In many respects, this transformation of concept and terminology is indicative of the change which has taken places as a result of the process of urbanization. The theory of nostalgia was developed in Europe at the time of the rise of the great cities when greatly improved means of transportation made movements of the population much

easier. But, at the same time, the social unit of the village, the particularities of the province, the local customs, the local dialects continued to exert all their influence. Between the village environment and the conditions encountered by an individual in the city or in the army, there was a great difference. The village environment, highly structured, constituted an important influence. The desire to return had a literal meaning; it was oriented toward a given geographical area, it concentrated on a given localized reality. It is evident that the decline of the theory of nostalgia coincided with the decline of particularism in the provinces, for the local rituals, the backward social structure have almost completely disappeared in Western Europe. Looking back toward the home is no longer a torment; returning no longer has any beneficial effect.

In many respects, the family unit, being closed and protective, has taken over the educational and "particularizing" function which the village community used to have. Already in the eighteenth century, the nosologist Boissier de Sauvages[31] noticed that nostalgia appeared in children, and that, in the case of children of gypsies, the disease was not caused by losing contact with a particular place but by being separated from their parents. Similar observations were to be made in the twentieth century. But, in the studies of René Spitz or of Bowlby, the term *nostalgia,* which formerly underlined the role of a particular native place, is replaced by more up-to-date terminology: anaclitic depression, hospitalism, maternal deprivation, and so on...[32]

As we have seen, Kant had previously stated that the nostalgic desired less to recover the scene of his birthplace than to recover the feelings of his own childhood. The action of returning was centered upon his own personal past. In developing the theories of *fixation* and *regression* into technical terminology, Freud simply made the explanation suggested by Kant explicit and precise. The

[31] F. Boissier de Sauvage, *Nosologia methodica,* Amsterdam, 1768, 2 Vols.

[32] The terms *hospitalism* and *anaclitic depression* are to be found in René A. Spitz, "Hospitalism. An Inquiry into the Genesis of Phychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. I, New York, 1945. René A. Spitz and Katherine M. Wolf, "Anaclitic Depression. An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood," *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 1946. J. Bowlby, *Soins maternels et santé mentale,* Geneva, OMS, 1951.

word regression, in its own way, takes up the idea of return. But the neurotic regresses within his own history. The village is interiorized.

What was at first defined in relation to the place of birth is thus redefined in relation to parental figures and to early stages of personal development. While the term nostalgia points to a given place, a concrete landscape, modern theories designate individuals or their likenesses, and symbolic substitutes which dominate childhood. Today, we are under the sway of the theory of social adaptation; nostalgia no longer designates the loss of one's native land, but the return toward the stages in which desire did not have to take account of external obstacles and was not condemned to defer its realization. In the case of civilized man, who is no longer rooted in a particular place, it is not the uprooting which causes trouble; it is rather the conflict between the exigencies of integration into the adult world and the temptation to conserve the unique status of the child. The literature of exile, more abundant than ever, is, for the most part, a literature concerned with the loss of childhood.