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Memory, Melancholy and Nostalgia

EDITOR'S NOTE

INTRODUCTION

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In our unstable world of permanent movement, migration, banishment or genocide, in the world which is “out of joint” and seems to immerse itself ever deeper in crisis, nostalgia has become a very common experience. Turning back towards “the olden days” looks like a tempting form of escape from the here and now, and it can have both healing and destructive effects. No wonder then that scientists and researchers representing a variety of disciplines pay increasing attention to the phenomenon of nostalgia. Especially interesting seems to be the collective level of experiencing nostalgia, when a society or a great part of it reveals shared feelings of longing for the past. A good example of such feelings can be nostalgia for the time of the communist regime in Poland and in other post-communist countries.

But nostalgia can also mean longing for something vague, indefinite or never existent. Nostalgic mood is therefore intertwined with melancholy. This term, most popular in the 19th

century, at the time of Romanticism, nowadays experiences a revival. Philosophers, writers, scientists, therapists and many others more and more often talk about melancholy instead of depression or sadness, not only to avoid medicalised or unequivocally pejorative terms, but also to stress the complexity of the human psyche. Melancholy, as well as nostalgia, is being described as an extremely complex and ambivalent state of mind, one that can be perceived as pleasant and unpleasant, desirable and intrusive, beneficial and harmful at the same time.

I am sure that the articles contained in the current issue of “Books Now” will shed important light on the phenomena of melancholy and nostalgia – in real life, in literature and in the arts.