

Nostalgia

Definition of Nostalgia

The term *nostalgia*, or the feeling of homesickness, has been derived from a Homeric term, “nostos,” which means homecoming. Homer used this term in his epic *Odyssey*, to show how homesick Odysseus grew when he freed himself from the war. However, the modern derivative of this term is medical research, as a student by the name of Johannes Hofer coined this term during his study of homesickness of mercenaries, including the associated anxiety and mental pain he observed among them.

However, in literature, nostalgia is employed to discuss a general interest in the past, or the personalities of the past, and subsequent feelings of pleasure or pain. The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines nostalgia as, “pleasure and sadness that is caused by remembering something from the past and wishing that you could experience it again.” Therefore, nostalgia is not only sadness or sickness, but also the pleasure of remembering, or taking interest in, the past. That is why the Romantic Movement in English literature has a special association with nostalgia, focusing on the pleasure and pain of remembering the past.

Examples of Nostalgia in Literature

Example #1: *Patriot into Traitor*, lines 1–5 (By Robert Browning)

“It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day!”

These are the opening lines from Robert Browning's famous poem "Patriot into Traitor," which shows how nostalgic the king has become about his past, when he is given a heroic welcome. The people gather everywhere to have his glance. However, after a time span of a year, everything changes. The people, who were happy to welcome him at that time, are now eager to see him going to gallows. That is why he becomes nostalgic about the past.

Example #2: *Little Dorrit* (By Charles Dickens)

"For I must now confess to you that I suffer from home-sickness — that I long so ardently and earnestly for home, as sometimes, when no one sees me, to pine for it. ... So dearly do I love the scene of my poverty and your kindness. O so dearly, O so dearly!"

These lines are from Charles Dickens' novel, *Little Dorrit*. This is Amy Dorrit's [dialogue](#), who cannot forget her past. On the other hand, all her family members pretend to have forgotten their past. Amy Dorrit has been so involved with her past that she feels pangs of those happy times, and is compelled to think about them. This is a good example of nostalgia by Charles Dickens.

Example #3: *The Daffodils*, lines 18–24 (By William Wordsworth)

"For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

This [stanza](#) is a good example of Romantic nostalgic poetry. This is the last stanza of *The Daffodils*, by William Wordsworth. The poet, having seen beautiful daffodils somewhere, now often sits alone on his couch, recalling the same scene, which brings him pleasure. This is an apt example of pleasure in nostalgia, because the poet experienced tranquility and peace of

mind in the company of the flowers, and he still feels the same afterward, when he is alone at home.

Function of Nostalgia

Despite changes in its meaning over time, nostalgia has not lost its significance in literature. It is used in poems, novels, and plays to evoke feelings of sadness or pleasure a [character](#) experiences when recalling his past. It could be the memory of a past event, a victory, a love, or a relationship. It is usually employed to evoke the same feelings among the readers, so that they also could feel the tinge of pain, or a bit of love for their near or dear ones. It could be used to evoke the feelings of pleasure the readers might feel for some past happenings. Nostalgia has more than one function to perform, such as turning a mood from sadness to pleasure, increasing positive self-respect, and doing away with prejudice about the past events.