YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH OR THE REDISCOVERY OF THE INNER STRENGTH OF MAN

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Abstract: *Starting from the following motto: "The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not? That is the telling question of his life"(Carl Gustav Jung), the present article tries to decipher the symbols, the parables and the fantastic nuances in the short story "Youth without Youth" by Mircea Eliade.*

Keywords: *unconscious, regeneration, spiritual dimension.*

On the Easter night, Dominic arrives to Bucharest with the intent to commit suicide. However, something happens and he can no longer go on with his plan. Somewhere, close to Metropolitan Church, under the threat of a strong storm and waiting at a traffic light, he is struck by a lightning.

The short story begins with the shocking moment which triggers a radical change in Dominic's state of mind. We can thus understand the lightning given certain features similar with those of a trauma: violent shock and its consequences on the entire body. The lightning moment is experienced by Dominic somehow similarly with the "birth trauma". He is taken to the hospital and we begin to understand the consequences of it. Dominic becomes a human being who totally depends on the others, he is like a baby in a state of disorder. He is helpless, cannot move or react, being able to hear only. At the same time, dreams alternate with the conscious state of mind.

The trauma and his condition after the lightning bring back to him memories of a certain period in his youth, dialogues between him and Laura. On the one hand, the topic of the dialogues allows us to understand how fond Dominic is of various branches of science and, on the other hand, his failure in the attempt to know everything. The failure comes from human limitation, as well as from his limited capacity to memorize as opposed to a "Mandarin memory", what Dominic wants for himself.

In dream, the regression is selective in what concerns the content, at a given moment. Dreams act as a scene in which Laura, the feminine figure, plays the part of a substitute for the maternal image. Dreams determine a detachment from the outside world, but some external factors, external sensorial stimuli, influence the dream phenomenon. The discussions with Laura could be a repetition of the primary relation with his mother and with primary narcissism. This state of autism in which the sense of reality is semi-absent can offer us the clue of a total regression, a total delirium.

Simultaneously with the state of the primary narcissism, a feeling of omnipotence arises. It is a state of experienced regression as if Dominic wanted to comprise from science part of the world and be one with it. He tells Laura that from an early age he wanted to study sciences: Mathematics, Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Japanese, History, Archeology, etc. It is a state which S. Ferenczi calls "baby king".

His self-esteem is directly dependent on the feeling of omnipotence. The only element that calibrates it and gives a narcissistic meaning to his merits is the consciousness of his own abilities associated with the consciousness of his own

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limitations. Dominic, however, seems to live with the illusion of his fancied value through the desire to have a thorough knowledge of all sciences.

There are more proofs of regression at that time. One of the encounters between Dominic and professor Stănciulescu, the person in charge with his case, an encounter initiated in order to communicate, is carried out by the professor who cautiously introduces his finger under Dominic's fingers gathered in fist. It is known that this is the first reflex gesture of a child in the early stage of his/her life.

The relation with the outside world, in regression, is marked by ambivalence. Dominic is not sure whether one of the nurses is kind and feels pity for him or whether she considers the possibility to remove the seringe out of his vein. Ambivalence offers the clue for the beginning of a relationship with the other, when the fears are of a persecutory nature and the object is labelled as good or bad and where the difference is between what's inside and what's outside. The fears are characteristic to a psychotic functioning, a delirium determined by the regression to a primary stage.

Despite the fact that the others don't give him any chance, Dominic begins to recover. His first words, a riposte, "I'm not mute", is accompanied by the falling of his teeth. Later on, his teeth start to regenerate. The opening of his eyes comes next and it confirms the fact that he is out of danger. The news of his rapid recovery quickly spreads and all sort of theories concerning the existence of the character start to emerge. Here we see the beginning of the paranoid delirium with regression to the stage in which the object is only partially separated and leads to double functioning. The double is a person whom he listens talking, especially while sleeping, and with whom he friendly or contradictorily discusses.

Dominic returns to an archaic and primitive manner of loving, the world being perceived as a source of either satisfaction or danger, and the instinctive desires transform the perception of reality. He fancies, lives with the illusion of the omnipotence of thought. It's enough to think and his desires come true. It is as if he tried to compensate something, to avoid something through a fake feeling of control and domination. A reason for this avoidance is the imminence of death.

In the state Dominic is in there is no separation between Ego and non Ego; it's what Freud called "oceanic feeling" which resembles the religious feeling. This signifies the denial of death, inseparability, extraordinary beatitude that triggers a mechanism for the removal of everything that's bad. At the narrative level, the Gestapo starts to hunt him and doctor Rudolf, the enigmatic and ambiguous character, appears and carries on electrocution experiments.

Little by little, Dominic's psychological and physical features are stressed: the regeneration of his skin and teeth comes first, then hypermnesia with its side effects, as the Professor calls it. That is the depiction of a past memory that comes with olfactory hallucinations: "Here I am with Laura in Tivoli. When I see the photo I begin to feel the heat of that morning and the smell of the oleander flowers, but also the heavy stench of hot fuel oil and I remember that 10 meters away from the place we were being photographed there were two buckets of fuel oil." (Mircea Eliade, 2004: 84).

The perception of reality is strongly affected by the instinctual desires, which function according to an archaic model. He finds it quite difficult to make the difference between external and internal, between dream experiences and the real ones. He cannot tell whether he really had a sexual experience with the young lady at number 6, whether he dreamt about it or had a somnambulism episode.

The scene at the sanatorium ends with professor Stănciulescu's death. The stateliness and omnipotence delirium gain bigger and bigger nuances and the mere

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desire to read a text makes its assimilation an instant one through a concentration exercise. He reaches at a new theory about mankind and places himself at the very centre of evolution as a psychomental being who anticipates the existence of the post historic man.

At the same time, the paranoid raving elements do not disappear. Monroe, the head of the gerontology department seems to have discovered his new identity. After leaving the sanatorium he is sent to Geneva where his appearance, name and profession are changed.

The meeting with Veronica is like an attempt to reinvest the object. The circumstances favoring the meeting, by storm and lightning, are similar with the shock-accident at the beginning of the story. The consequences of the accident make Veronica regress, her soul transmigrates in time to Rupini, the Buddhist recluse. Given his knowledge and his extraordinary capacity to memorize, Dominic can communicate with her in Sanskrit. Helped by Rupini's transmigration, Dominic can go back in time and gather information, learn archaic languages and reach the absolute knowledge. But this knowledge means a complete lack of frustration, of tension; it means death.

Dominic lives with the nostalgia of an archaic period and with the confusion regarding the distance between him and an object. He is either living under the danger of a total fusion, that is death, or under the danger of absence, autism.

There is no wonder that once he is close to the absolute truth time accelerates, Veronica gets old and Dominic, fearing sentimental involvement, gives up the relationship.

All characters in the short story have the same destiny. We could see them as internal objects annihilated by destructive impulses. The good and idealized object is in search of an unlimited and immediate recompense. The events that succeed each other in the novel could be understood as a permanent struggle, the struggle between the tendency to invest the object (the relation with the characters) and the tendency to annihilate it.

I shall end this bird's-eye view of one of Mircea Eliade's less commented short stories (but if we are to consider the modern cinema reviews, one of the most important texts about the crisis of modern man), with the writer's own words: "The history of religions reaches down and makes contact with that which is essentially human: the relationship of man with the sacred. The history of religions can play an extremely important role in the crisis we are living through. The crises of modern man are to a large extent religious ones, insofar as they are an awakening of his awareness to an absence of meaning".

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