

The Psychological and Physical Pain in the Neurological Syphilis by Some Literature between XIX and XX Century

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Abstract

An even if brief representation of a neurologic syphilis within the Literature between XIX century and the half of XX, is relatively exhaustive. Through the chosen works, and above all through the words of its Authors affected by the disease, we can appreciate the social trouble represented by syphilis during those years; moreover, we cannot omit its clinic complexity in this medical phase. So, we can show a neurological syphilis that arises to some new medical and scientific debates allowing the born of Social Disease's although showing psychological soaked troubles while everyone mirrors in Contemporary Age.

Keywords: Neurological syphilis; Pain; Psychology; Psychotherapy

Commentary

Between XIX century and first half of XX, the physicians are involved in the discussions on the neurological damages by syphilis while both the writers and poets write some very important scientific and literary pages on the same argument. These pages show the Authors' cultural sensibility as regards this disease emphasizing the aberration of the biological, psychological, moral, and social balance by that subject who is affected by the neurological syphilis. Moreover, these pages show their genius, but also their dandyism, their decline, their bohemienne life instigating them to take refuge in the alcohol, in the drug and in the voluptuousness, too.

These are the years, as Charles Baudelaire writes, [...] *everyone feels the republican spirit in their veins and the syphilis in own bones* [1]; syphilis is a so spread disease as the renowned syphilitic Gustave Flaubert says, *Some more, some less all are affected* [2]. The recurrence of the "forgotten" syphilis affecting the nervous system has described by Alphonse Daudet. He after twenty years, in 1878 feels some odd tastes, some sudden fingers' trembles, and cognitive deficiencies. He feel some intense pains like the great blazes, pins and needles in his both feet and a greater sound's sensibility: all the little noises cause him a great din in his head. He has no any reflex. Daily, he always makes desperate efforts, and he is subject to hallucinations, fears, and groans. Syphilis' recurrence is it! Daudet collects all his remarks and meditations on his disease in a beautiful diary which will be published as "La Douleur", in 1931. Daudet writes his diary from dictation by his psychological and physical pain! The psychological effects by neurological syphilis, causing a locomotor ataxia, are so great to remind that "arabesque" reality characterizing the psychic aura before the epileptic attack. Day by day, his diary has enriched with a great pain, and psychological uncomfotableness. From Daudet words: [...] *the worry of a erect walk, the fear of those pangs stopping [...] or writhing me [...] is a torture [...] there are no any words to describe it, it need only howl it! What's the use of the words to really describe the feeling of the pain? The words arrive when it have gone away, when all is calm. The words are all powerless, and false, and regard only the memories. Morphine has effect on me.* And, at this point, Daudet writes about his psycho and physical therapy, too. Chloral allows him to rest a little so as the bromide; but, paying dear for all! From his words, again: *I feel Erebus, that black and shady wave, nothing at the end of the life, nothing. What good immersion, what a delight when somebody entries within the nothing! Somebody feel like enveloping, taken all.* But, without chloral therapy: [...] *closed one's*

eyes. Opened gulf [...]. [There are] doziness in a short time, all gives me sliding, and rolling nightmares, dizziness, hell. Daudet is afflicted with pain and stress, so continues: [...] *To appeal own will in everything is very difficult, and it is a real torture; I am appeal my will to walk, to stand up, to sit down, to put on my hat or to take off my hat. It is very dreadful! Will cannot do anything only on the thought, and on its perpetual motion. It would be very pleasure to stop; but no, the spider goes straight ahead, goes straight ahead, without any stop only for some hour into chloral it! Because Macbeth killed sleep from year to year.* Daudet compares his psychological and physical pain with Cross agony: [...] *hands' torsion, feet's torsion, knee's torsion, I am on edge very much. I feel cut blow, and to quench my burning thirst, [...] I need a spoonful of iodine bromide tasting like bitter salt. And, here it is the apotheosis: Pain is ringing in my empty anemic skeleton, like any sound in home without any furniture. The whole day, and the whole night, my only living thing is my torture and my torment.* The chloral, morphine, bromide do not recover him: *Oh my torture, I hope my eyes can find within you all that countries that I'll cannot see: [...] Is you my Philosophy, is you my Science. I know only to yell to my sons: "long live the life".*

Other Authors suffering own dangerous neurologic syphilis consider it as the center of their works allowing its hidden aspects to be known. Surely, the writer and physician Hermann Oskar Panizza must be emphasized by his work "Das Liebes koncil" describing syphilis' born highlighting its atrociousness united to its progress until the general paralysis. In his history, Virgin Mary consults Satan in order to create a disease to punish the humanity foulness, at will of God. So, syphilis born from the union between Satan (the Evil) and the Woman, Salomé (the dualism Good and Evil, Beauty and Fraud, Fascination and Danger, Lewdness and Cruelty) who'll spread the disease. Here it is one out the most beautiful literary pages on the history of syphilis, by Panizza: *Such is the poison strength inserted in the veins [of the Woman] that anyone*

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will touch her will have own eyes as a glass ball! His belief shall curdle. [...] At the end of the year his nose will fall in the soup [...] then, he'll change home, work; he'll become pitiful and sentimental [...] he'll become moralist; he'll play at the insects in the sun envying the new spring plants. If he is Protestant shall become Catholic, and vice versa. [...] At the end of five years [...] his body shall shake and shall burn as a firework; he'll can walk again and he'll be afraid to look at his foot if it is again. [...] One day his bone shall break off his skeleton, and he'll smell it and casting it into a corner. Then he'll become pious, very pious, and always very pious [...]. After ten years, he'll be confined in his bed as a putrid skeleton; he'll be dying and opening his throat toward the ceiling, and calling himself on the reasons of anything, and at the end he'll dye. Satana says the Virgin Mary: Now, his soul will be yours! [3]. But, the psychiatric Panizza is not less important than the writer Panizza; in his "Der Illusionismus..." he places side by side own dementia steps caused by the neuro-syphilis and the creation of all those illusions caused by the psychotic brain steps. His words: [...] *illusion is a my brain's activity [which] uses up, softens, and melts [...] in those parts where -for our empirical concept- placed our illusions; the cortex loses some hundred grams of parts producing the most great megalomania, an illusionistic firework [...]. It shines under the destruction [!]* [4]. The madness by the neuro-syphilis is wonderfully showed, and lived by Guy de Maupassant affected by it, also, in "Le Horla"; a fantastic title meaning in the work *Him, the Other, the Voice, the new Sir* who obsesses, possesses, and controls Maupassant's mind. Now, he is that *Black Tenant* who not only takes the place of the writer Maupassant but of the man Maupassant, too. Maupassant's words: *I am lost! Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my beliefs. [...] Who is this invisible and not human entity? [...] The Horla shall make the man as its home, its slave and its food by only its will; so as the man made with the horse. Woe betides us!* [5].

This neurologic tragedy becomes a very great real social trouble when it is the consequence of that syphilis transmitted by the parents to their offspring. On this topic, Henrik Ibsen makes an important contribute in "Et Dukkehjem" and in "Gengangere" where the neuro-syphilis due to the "inherited" syphilis is considered as a punishment on the parents. Again, André Couvreur evidentiates the same social trouble in "Les Marcenilles", but Jean Moyë is more explicative in "La vie d'un hérédo" when he shows the life and the pains of a patient affected by the "inherited" syphilis who is called "heredo" at the end of XIX century. Eugène Brieux makes first social theatrical work "Les avaries" highlighting the power of the disease; by his words: [...] *an imperious mistress which does not bear to ignore its power. Anybody who considers it non important is in danger. But it is benignant towards who knows its dangerous character. And, like some women, it is cruel only when anybody ignores it* [6]. When any Author suffers own neurological effects of syphilis, then the truth is more painful.

This is the case of Louis Hervieu in her "Le crime"; she is known due to her interest to spread the inherited syphilis' disease as a "familiar" trouble; these are some her words: *[syphilis] centers on the vulnerable parts, the tired and weakened nervous centers. It produces mad men, half mad men, a quarter of mad men, lunatic men, obsessed men* [7]. Daudet family is a very great representation of the inherited syphilis. The physician and writer Léon is affected by that syphilis transmitted to his by his father, Alphonse. Léon in "Les morticoles" and in "Devant la douleur" describes the most part of the social and psychological effects of own diseases, and pointing on the positive effects of its etiological agent, writes one out of the most beautiful literary pages on its positive stimulation of the neurons. So, in "L'hérédo essai sur le drame interieur", he promotes the spirochete an "excitant"; these are some his wonderful steps: [...] *the psycho-intellective functions are wholly or partly increased; the fearful disease's microbe [...], it is the prick of genius and talent, of*

heroism and soul, of general paralysis, of tabes and of the most part of all degenerations. Sometimes it excites and promotes, sometimes it benumbs and paralyzes, the inherited treponeme corrodes the cord and the brain piercing it through; it is linked to strokes, manias, great discoveries and sclerosis; as it has grown by the inbreed among syphilitic families, the inherited treponeme had, has and will have a role comparable with that of fate in the ancient times. It is that invisible soul which promotes the romantic men, those madmen, the wonderful-looking stragier and the pedantic or violent revolutionary men. It is the dough's ferment, that dough of the farmer refining it in the second offspring. In front of a maid's son, it make him a great poet, a good little middle-class person becomes a satyr, a merchant becomes a metaphysic, a sailor becomes an astronomer or a conqueror. The most part of the degenerations, those crimes due to the alcohol are ascribable to this quick, biting spiral. A real mystery [...]. Treponeme favors the dramatic life's intensity, the sterility that is its contrary and its crueller plagues [8]. Syphilis-genius debate is so interesting also in the literature that Mark la Marche in his work "Tréponème" shows his theory according with the revitalization of all psychic centers revitalized after its attack by *Treponema pallidum*. And in his poetry "Syphilis" la Marche makes evident the genius by syphilis: *Are you, syphilis, the great mistress, / drives the man to his genius, / the source of ponderous thoughts, / the spreader of the science and arts germ, / the inspiratory of all kind madness? [...] You crashes by the sobs the poet's soul / of the wonderful musician / you inspire the metaphysics' studios / you educates the painful eye of the pathetic painter / and the voice of the tragedian. / A to day the world is waiting for the torches and kings, / chimera's ambassadors. / You can give us it. [...] If we must raise the cross / to possess it, we accept your laws. / Oh, syphilis, you are the salt of the earth* [9]. The words by Thomas Mann in his "Doktor Faustus" are the real demonstration of the relationship between the neurological syphilis and its social aspects. Adrian, the protagonist, becomes a true patterns of social sacrifice as for syphilis: *Poison is an inspiration, it intoxicates and incites, it can make some genial and wonderful works, enthusiastically; devil drives his hand but seized him, at the end: here it is the paralysis!* [...] *[Syphilis] all the boys swear that thanks to your madness they need not to be mad. They are health due to its madness and you'll be health in them* [10]. While the relationship syphilis-genius is popular with difficulty, the physicians are sure regard the implication of the nervous system by syphilis is adopted in its history of the literature. In "Vénus ou les deux risques" by Michel Corday, the physician who is protagonist' friend, says: *[Syphilis] affects the nervous system. It is its dainty, its dessert. It chooses a place. It can break off the external communication, suppress the five senses. Here it is a kind diseases' bouquet [...] it affects the brain, the royal morsel. Here it is the general paralysis, the total madness [...]* [11]. But, it is not only the brain to be affected; in fact, the marrow of Maxime in "Le docteur Pascal" by Emile Zola is affected in its more inner part, because the marrow represents own life, and all the effects of the neuro-syphilis as the migraine, the depression, the neurosis are the real life of the syphilis' patients [12]. Due to it, it is very important the prevention campaign towards the youth that is represented in the literature of this period, too: James Joyce in "Ulysses" and Joris-Karl Huysmans in "A Rebours".

The above European works united to others describing the neurological syphilis written in XIX and XX century allowed us to find some important social-cultural and medical-sanitary features. The authority of the physicians is relevant, but all syphilitic patients are very "isolated" by the rest of people.

Very interestingly, the neurological syphilis is considered third degeneration characterizing the Modern society after the alcoholism, and tuberculosis. In this period, syphilis' treatment had accepted by all people believing in any religious intervention, too.

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