

# Do you have senile symptoms?

I met her after 30 years of absence. Thirty years she spent in a Western city where a mixture of cultures and races and a variety of dynamic activities contributed to make of it an international cultural center.

Her face and figure did not carry the fingerprints of time. The quiet, ironic smile that I knew still hovered over her lips. That is a good sign, I thought, but what do these appearances indicate? A youthful mind behind the youthful face? What impression did the thirty years of intellectual contact leave on her soul?

No signs of change could I detect in her personality. The woman who sat before me still had the same accent, the same manners that she had thirty years ago. She repeated the same expressions, the same traditional compliments, discussed the same old topics dealing with the weather, marriage and birth, disease and death, good health and poor health, beauty and ugliness and other hackneyed, commonplace subjects. Her head was still filled with news concerning her brother, her sister and their progeny. They are still for her, as they were in the past, an object of pride. She herself had no identity, no personal existence. If she had been married, she would have enumerated to me her husband's achievements and those of her children, just as she does when she talks about her brother, her sister and their progeny. She remembers, however, her old friends and acquaintances. She likes to hear about them, not because she is really attached to them but out of curiosity and a desire to kill time.

What was she doing in emigration land? She occupied herself with a job which filled most of her time. In her free hours, she evoked stories and news items about her brother and sister and their progeny. She inquired about the new acquaintances she acquired over there, enjoyed hearing their news items, moved by the same desire to kill time.

This woman is one of thousands who live according to a stereotyped way of life. They move in a space not exceeding a few meters, though they may have crossed thousands of miles during their life time. They live on the margin of society, not knowing what goes on around them, personifying those groups that ruminate about their past because of inertia or because they are afraid of the effort required for the acceptance and assimilation of new ideas. In other instances, static individuals may cling to their past as a means of preserving their interests and maintaining traditions that ensure for them legal or illegal privileges, allowing them to lead an easy, passive life.

The woman I met after 30 years of absence carried in her soul, not in her face, the signs of senility. Many are her likes, who deceive other people with a modern, elegant appearance and intense physical energy, while their minds are fossilized and their ideas obsolete.

Senility is a disease that may attack young men and women as well as old people. Each person is called to examine himself from time to time, to see if he has unknowingly contracted senile symptoms, or entered the stage that characterizes people on their way to deterioration and decay.