



Germany were as eager to surrender their freedom as their fathers were to fight for it; that instead of wanting freedom, they sought for ways of escape from it; that other millions were indifferent and did not believe the defense of freedom to be worth fighting and dying for. . . .⁷⁹

In discussing the reasons for this surrender Fromm says

. . . it seems that the majority of men are suggestible, half awake children, willing to surrender their will to anyone who speaks with a voice that is threatening or sweet enough to sway them. Indeed, he who has a conviction strong enough to withstand the opposition of the crowd is the exception rather than the rule, an exception often admired centuries later, mostly laughed at by his contemporaries.⁸⁰

Fromm goes on to say that man's desire to escape from the burden and anxiety of freedom is a part of the great sickness in the character structure of modern man.⁸¹ It has been a prevalent sickness since the emergence of the individual after the collapse of the social character and social structure of the Middle Ages. When man emerged as an individual in history he discovered his own separateness, and nature became an object apart from him, which challenged his intelligence if he hoped to master it.⁸² While the emergence of the individual brought new strengths, man was torn away from the sense of belonging and the certainty of rank and position in the medieval social system. He was on his own. His new-found freedom uprooted him from his previously confined but uncomplicated, unified system and left him with grave self-doubts, personal isolation, and bitter skepticism--all in the midst of a highly competitive world where human relationships were continually fractured in

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 17. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as THOM.)

⁸¹Fromm, EFF., p. 20. ⁸²Ibid., p. 62.



the life and death struggle to obtain wealth, fame, and power.⁸³

The isolation and aloneness of the emerging individual has not changed; severe anxiety still accompanies the process of individuation, and twentieth century man no less than Renaissance man knows that his existence is seriously threatened. Modern man is still the freak of nature groping to find his way. Fromm states

. . . he has to find principles of action and decision-making which replace the principles of instinct. He has to have a frame of orientation which permits him to organize a consistent picture of the world as a condition for consistent actions. He has to fight not only against the dangers of dying, starving, and being hurt, but also against another danger which is specifically human: that of becoming insane. . . .⁸⁴

The demands upon modern man are tremendous, and even though he summons up enormous energy to fight battles which will free him from enslavement, he is eager, as we have seen, to surrender his freedom once he achieves it.⁸⁵ One of the ways in which he defends himself against the loneliness and isolation which comes with new-found freedom is to regress to mother, or to resist breaking the strong ties to mother and her successors.⁸⁶ The nature of this regression will be examined in the next chapter.

⁸³Ibid., p. 65. ⁸⁴Fromm, TROH., pp. 63-64.

⁸⁵Fromm, EFF., p. 17.

⁸⁶Suzuki, Fromm, and De Martino, ZBAP., p. 89.



Chapter 2

THE ORIGIN AND DESCRIPTION OF INCESTUOUS TIES

THE BASIC TIE TO MOTHER

There is no more basic natural tie than that of the child to the mother. Life begins within the mother's womb, and after birth the child remains helpless, in need of mother's love, protection, and care, for a longer period of time than other animal babies require.¹ Even in the first years of a child's life no great separation from the mother occurs. The one who has given birth continues to be a source of life giving attention to his physiological and emotional needs.²

The baby is her own, therefore, the mother's loving care is given without restriction regardless of the child's ability to fulfill her needs. Fromm says of this relationship:

. . . The child, in these decisive years of his life, has the experience of his mother as the fountain of nourishing power. Mother is food; she is love; she is warmth; she is earth. To be loved by her means to be alive, to be rooted, to be at home.³

If a child is to grow up, however, he must gradually enter into areas of life where he is forced to stand alone without mother's help and protection. The move into adulthood means taking responsibility for oneself and for others, while facing increasingly greater risks and perplexities of life. There is little wonder that the adult looks back wistfully and enviously to the relatively carefree and untroubled days

¹Fromm, TSS., p. 43. ²Ibid.

³Ibid.



of childhood. Fromm points out that it is impossible for a person to give up his fierce longing to return to mother if he has not found mature relationships which provide appropriate ways of being rooted in adult life.⁴

The incest tabu which is found in the most primitive societies is in Fromm's opinion ". . . the necessary condition for all human development, not because of its sexual, but because of its affective aspect."⁵ Man does not easily establish himself harmoniously in adult life. He does not always find new fulfilling forms of rootedness. He feels the anxieties of his existence and looks back longingly, but he must cut the umbilical cord and search for different solutions to his problems which mother can no longer provide. The tabu against incest ". . . is nothing else but the two cherubim with fiery swords guarding the entrance to Paradise and preventing man from returning to the preindividual existence."⁶

SIGMUND FREUD'S THEORY OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Sigmund Freud saw the problem of mother fixation as a tremendous obstacle in the life of the individual. The great intensity of this unbroken tie was derived from the son's sexual interest in his mother, an interest which did not seem to change. Freud assumed that a strong incestuous interest was a part of man's nature, and because of this striving a boy came to see his father as a hated rival for the affections

⁴Ibid., p. 44.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., pp. 44-45.



of his mother. ". . . Freud then reconciled assumption and observation into a most ingenious explanation, that of the 'Oedipus Complex.'"⁷

According to Freud the Oedipus Complex was at the heart of every neurosis, and mental illness could be the only result for the person who remained bound to the parent of the opposite sex. Further, he was convinced that the appearance of the incest tabu throughout the world gave strong evidence to support his thesis.⁸

In his interpretation of the Oedipus myth Freud found ancient evidence to support his doctrine of the Oedipus Complex. The myth as presented in Sophocles' trilogy was based on the crime of incest. Had not Oedipus slain his father and married his mother?⁹ Freud was certain that this myth clearly showed the son's unconscious incestuous drives and the desire to kill the father-rival. This psychological striving was identified so indisputably in "Oedipus the King" that Freud seemed most justified in giving the name "Oedipus Complex" to his theory.¹⁰

In Freud's later work he realized, ". . . more implicitly than explicitly. . . ." ¹¹ says Fromm, that mother attachment is not just limited to males but involves both sexes. He came to see ". . . that the phase of Oedipal attachment to the mother, which may be called the pre-Oedipus phase, is far more important in women than it can claim to be in men."¹² But Freud saw the pre-Oedipus phase of girls only in the confines of his libido theory.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Fromm, PAR., p. 70.

⁹Erich Fromm, The Forgotten Language (New York: Grove Press, 1951), p. 228.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 200.

¹¹Erich Fromm, THOM., p. 96.



FROMM'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Although Freud discovered the tremendous psychological implications of mother fixation, Fromm is convinced that the founder of psychoanalysis

. . . emasculated his discovery by the peculiar interpretation which he gave to it. He projects into the little boy the sexual feeling of the adult man; the little boy having, as Freud recognized, sexual desires, was supposed to be attracted to the woman closest to him, and only by the superior power of the rival in this triangle, is he forced to give up his desire, without ever recovering fully from his frustration. . . .¹³

Freud has given

. . . curiously rationalistic interpretation of the observable facts. In putting emphasis on the sexual aspect of the incestuous desire, Freud explains the boy's desire as something rational in itself and evades the real problem: the depth and intensity of the irrational affective tie to mother, the wish to return into her orbit to remain a part of her, the fear of emerging fully from her. . . .¹⁴

Freud saw the presence of the father-rival as defeating the fulfillment of the incestuous desire, but in reality, says Fromm, ". . . the incestuous wish is in contrast to all requirements of adult life."¹⁵

In his great discovery Freud came close to what Fromm sees as the incestuous struggle, but in the long run he missed the point. Fromm declares:

Thus, the theory of the Oedipus Complex is at the same time the acknowledgement and the denial of the crucial phenomenon: man's longing for mother's love. In giving the incestuous striving paramount significance the importance of the tie with mother is recognized; by explaining it as sexual the emotional--and true--meaning of the tie is denied.¹⁶

That there are cases in which the attachment to the mother has sexual manifestations, Fromm does not deny. When it occurs

¹³Fromm, TSS., p. 45. ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 45-46.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 46. ¹⁶Ibid.



. . . it is because the affective fixation is so strong that it also influences the sexual desire, but not because the sexual desire is at the root of the fixation. On the contrary the sexual desire as such is notoriously fickle with regard to its objects, and generally sexual desire is precisely that force which helps an adolescent in his separation from mother, and not the one which binds him to her. . . .¹⁷

But when the function of the sexual desire has been diverted, and the son has turned his desire with great intensity toward his mother, Fromm contends that two possibilities must be considered:

. . . One is that the sexual desire for mother is a defense against desire to return to the womb; the latter leads to insanity or death, while the sexual desire is at least compatible with life. One is saved from the fear of the threatening womb by the nearer-to-life phantasy of entering the vagina with the appropriate organ.

. . . .¹⁸

Fromm points to a dream in which the alternative to complete regression is portrayed. In this dream the son is caught in a cave and fears suffocation: but when the dream shifts to a scene showing the son having intercourse with his mother, there is a relief from the fearful feeling.¹⁹

A second possibility must also be considered. Fromm writes

. . . that the phantasy of sexual intercourse with the mother does not have the quality of adult male sexuality, that of voluntary, pleasurable activity, but that of passivity, of being conquered and possessed by mother, even in the sexual sphere.²⁰

Both of these possibilities suggest a pattern of severe psychopathology. But there are situations in which the mother acts as seducer of her son attempting to direct his sexual interests toward herself. In this instance a type of mother fixation can result, but it is ". . . less indicative of severe pathology."²¹

¹⁷Ibid. ¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

In his dialogue with Erich Fromm, Richard K. Evans says

. . . Freud spoke of the premature sexuality which emerges at this level when the young child falls in love with the parent of the opposite sex, and of the complicating castration fear which must be resolved through some form of repression or sublimation, and so on. In conjunction with your remarks on the limitations of Freud's conceptualizations, do you feel that this view of the Oedipal situation is too limited and could be expanded?²²

And Fromm replies to this question:

Yes, I feel that it, too, could be expanded. I also think, as was the case with narcissism, that the Oedipal situation is even more profound and more powerful than Freud thought it was, because Freud looked at it in a slightly rationalistic way. The little boy, once he has reached the phallic level, has sexual wishes with regard to women. The mother is a woman who is there close to him; therefore this triangle develops.

But the relative importance attributed by Freud to this situation pales beside what I think was Freud's real discovery, the tremendous power--possibly the greatest passion which exists in man or woman--of the wish to return to the womb, to mother's breast, to mother's lap, to that which is certain, to that which is protecting, to that which does not force one to make decisions. You might say it involves escaping from freedom into the past--into the enveloping, protecting, loving warmth of the mother or of a person with a "motherly" function. This doesn't mean necessarily the real mother. It can be a grandmother, a grandfather, an idol; it can be someone who has this function of unconditional love, of unconditional protection. However, this escape is at the expense of the full development of the person. Therefore it constitutes in some significant sense his rejection of his potential independence, his refusal to actualize his independence.²³

It is this pre-Oedipal attachment of both sexes to the mother which deserves the greatest attention and is ". . . qualitatively different from the Oedipal attachment of boys to their mother. . . ." ²⁴
The genital desires of the little boy pale in comparison to this far more

²²Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm, p. 70.

²³Ibid., pp. 70-71. ²⁴Fromm, THOM., p. 97.



important phenomenon.²⁵ Actually, the Oedipus Complex, as Fromm sees it, is not a universal phenomenon as Freud supposed; the rivalry between son and father is brought forth by the stresses of a patriarchal society.²⁶ The child struggles to free himself from his father's domination and, particularly in this "Oedipal period," strives to emerge from his infantile dependency and develop his own individuality. The sexual rivalry may appear at this time, but in any case it is not the basic issue nor the cause of the problem.²⁷

The pre-Oedipal attachment on the other hand is "... the central phenomena in the evolutionary process and one of the main causes of neurosis and psychosis."²⁸ Whereas Freud gave enormous importance to the Oedipus Complex, Fromm reinterpreted the complex and shifts his concern to this pre-Oedipal phase of development in which the incestuous striving is quite different from the boy's genital wishes in the Oedipal stage of development.²⁹

CAUSES OF MOTHER FIXATION

One of the possible causes for this pre-Oedipal attachment can be found, for instance, in the developmental situation of a boy, whose "loving" mother spoiled, pampered, or dominated him without interference from a weak father who never took a strong part in the child's

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Erich Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970), pp. 101-102. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as TCOP.)

²⁷Clara Thompson and Patrick Mullahy, Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development (New York: Grove Press, 1950), p. 209.

²⁸Fromm, THOM., p. 97. ²⁹Ibid.



upbringing.³⁰

. . . In this case he may remain fixed at an early mother attachment, and develop into a person who is dependent on mother, feels helpless, has the strivings characteristic of the receptive person. That is, to receive, to be protected, to be taken care of, and who has a lack of fatherly qualities--discipline, independence, and ability to master life by himself. . . .³¹

The incestuous tie to mother may be developed as a result of the child's fear of the mother in which case Fromm states:

. . . This fear is first of all the result of the very dependency which weakens the person's own sense of strength and independence; it can also be the fear of the very tendencies which we find in the case of deep regression: that of being the suckling or of returning to mother's womb. These very wishes transform the mother into a dangerous cannibal, or all destroying monster. . . .³²

Such fears are frequently related to real experiences with "cannibalistic," necrophilic mothers, and cannot be regarded as fearful imagery arising from regressive fantasies. If the child of such a severely ill mother does not sever his ties with her, such fears of being consumed are inevitable, eventually driving the harrassed individual to madness. It is the intensity and complexity of this fear which makes it so very difficult for the individual to break away from the sick mother. He is caught already in a morbid dependency; his own freedom and initiative have been greatly weakened, and in his fear and weakness he is afraid to seek change.³³

In his paper "The Oedipus Complex: Comments on the Case of Little Hans," which is a clinical study of how mother-fear and incestuous attachment can develop, Fromm challenges Freud's analysis of the

³⁰Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), p. 45. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as TAOL.)

³¹Ibid. ³²Fromm, THOM., p. 100.

³³Ibid.

relationship of the little boy to his parents. Freud was sure that Hans was truly "little Oedipus," a classic illustration of his own theory in which a boy who enjoyed close company with his mother developed a phobia of horses, which, to Freud, was a clear indication of his fear of castration resulting from his death wish which he held against his father.³⁴ Fromm, taking Freud's own clinical description of the case, concluded that the founder of psychoanalysis had erred greatly in seeing the mother as the innocent party in this picture. There was no doubt that the child was afraid of castration as Freud perceived, but these fears came from actual threats delivered, not by the father, but by Hans' mother who had unwittingly terrorized her child by her double threats of castration and abandonment.³⁵ Freud had assumed that a boy's endogenous desires for his mother had produced the Oedipal sickness in Hans,³⁶ but he overlooked the decided seductiveness on the part of the mother which contributed so greatly in this case to the high level of disturbance and tension in the child's life.³⁷

Many analysts have observed over the years that the greatest good and the most destructive forms of evil can be effected by the mother according to the degree of health or sickness within her own personality.³⁸

IRRATIONAL DEPENDENCY

The needs of the infant for a mother are quite normal, but if

³⁴Fromm, TCOP., p. 70. ³⁵Ibid., pp. 71-72.

³⁶Ibid., p. 73.

³⁷Ibid., p. 43.

³⁸Ibid., p. 74.



there is no mother or mothering person to meet these needs, the infant, who requires constant love and care, which are neither earned nor merited, dies.³⁹

But the more obvious fact--that the infant needs a mothering person--has obscured the fact that not only the infant is helpless and craves certainty; the adult is in many ways not less helpless. Indeed, he can work and fulfill the tasks ascribed to him by society; but he is also more aware than the infant of the dangers and risks of life; he knows of the natural and social forces he cannot control, the accidents he cannot foresee, the sickness and death he cannot elude. . . .⁴⁰

In the midst of such pressures and such uncertainty man continues to long for security and protection. Fromm points out that such a longing is a repetition of his wish to find mother's help and love again, and it is also ". . . because the very same conditions which make the infant long for mother's love continue to exist, although on a different level."⁴¹ If only "Mother" could be found for the rest of time on earth, men and women who are suffering with the uncertainties, anxieties, and risks of life would have no great problem. The healthy man comes to see that no road leads back to the lost paradise. He must live with the anxieties, learning to rely on his own initiative and activity while he discovers that ". . . only the full development of his powers can give him a modicum of strength and fearlessness."⁴²

From the day he is born man struggles with the two alternatives: one, to move forward in risk and uncertainty, and, the second, to regress by going back to protection and dependence on mother, or to find a mother substitute.⁴³

³⁹Fromm, THOM., p. 97. ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 97-98.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 98.

⁴²Ibid. "

⁴³Ibid.



Although the return to mother is a major temptation for man throughout his life, Fromm states that "the problem of incest, however, is not restricted to the fixation to the mother."⁴⁴ Mother is the first to give unconditional love, care, and protection, but as he grows up man attaches himself to others who will take her place. In this way the mothering person is replaced by family, or clan, or by all who share blood kinship and soil identity.⁴⁵ Mother surrogates develop when groups grow in size and number, and the state, the church, or a political party may assume the role of protector, one which can minimize the risks and cushion the shocks of life.⁴⁶ When this relationship develops the individual becomes heavily dependent on the surrogate mothering clan or institution. He derives his sense of worth and identity from these ties. Others who do not have the same symbiotic attachments are looked upon as threatening intruders.⁴⁷

It is undoubtedly the realization that a mother can die before her child does that provokes a mother-dependent person to seek the immortal mothering person. Of this quest Fromm has written

... the allegiance to one personal mother leaves one alone and isolated from others who have different mothers. If, however, the whole clan, the nation, the race, the religion, or God can become a common "mother," then mother-worship transcends the individual and unites him with all those who worship the same mother idol; then nobody needs to be embarrassed at idolizing mother; the praise of the "mother" common to the group will unite all minds and eliminate all jealousies. The many cults of the Great Mother, the cult of the Virgin, the cult of nationalism and patriotism--they all bear witness to the intensity of this worship.⁴⁸

Those who have not been able to break away from their mothers

⁴⁴Fromm, TSS., p. 45. ⁴⁵Fromm, THOM., p. 98.

⁴⁶Ibid. ⁴⁷Fromm, TSS., p. 45.

⁴⁸Fromm, THOM., p. 99.



and dissolve the intense mother orientation in their lives are unconsciously determined to continue their dependency, and they are the same personality types who develop, through a transfer of concern and allegiance, passionate attachment to nation, race, clan, blood, and land. Fromm declares that the empirical evidence shows a "close correlation" between those who are fixated on mother and those who give their greatest loyalty to the larger protective mothering group.⁴⁹

THE LEVELS OF FIXATION

Within the incestuous complex Fromm finds degrees of regression. There is a benign form which scarcely seems to fall into the pathological category, and there are complicated malignant expressions of incestuous fixation which Fromm classifies as "incestuous symbiosis."⁵⁰

. . . In speaking of distinct levels here, I am only choosing a form of description which is convenient for the purpose of a brief presentation; in reality there are not three distinct levels; there is a continuum which stretches from the most harmless to the most malignant forms of incestuous fixation. The levels I describe here are typical points in this continuum; in a more fully developed discussion of this topic, each level could be divided into "sublevels". . . .⁵¹

The benign form of mother fixation is not uncommon, but it does not really distort the pattern of a man's life. There is no interference with normal heterosexual relationships. This man wants to be mothered, admired, fed, and comforted, but if this kind of attention is not forthcoming, he may become mildly anxious and depressed. Fromm states that in the lives of most men there is this residual need for mother-- this element of fixation which is never entirely overcome. If the

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 33. "

⁵¹Ibid., p. 101.



fixation is of a more serious nature, however, sexual and emotional conflict usually develops interfering with the man's ability to relate to women.⁵²

Little independence has been developed by those who fit into this category. A mothering person must always be available yet, while giving support, make few or no requests for help or emotional support herself.⁵³ In its severest form Fromm states that a man may marry a woman who is stern and demanding, a wife-mother whom he fears, and who in fact makes him feel guilty if he shows any inclination to pursue any interests which are not specifically chosen and approved by her. Such a husband, who is always afraid that his wife will be angry and displeased with him, will find this situation unbearable and will then rebel unconsciously only to become guilty to such an extent that he will try to be all the more compliant with his wife's demands.⁵⁴

The rebellion of this second level man is often manifested in depressive moods, outbursts of temper, psychosomatic complaints, sexual infidelity, or in a general irrational effort aimed at blocking the efforts of others. He may have serious misgivings over his self-image as a man, or he may suffer with debilitating sexual disorders such as impotence or homosexuality.⁵⁵

When mother-fixation is combined with a "seductive male-narcissistic attitude" another pattern is formed because it becomes clear to a little boy that he defeated the claims of his father and won full maternal attention and favor.⁵⁶ Of this situation Fromm states:

⁵²Ibid. ⁵³Ibid., pp. 101-102.

⁵⁴Ibid. ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁶Ibid.



. . . This narcissistic conviction makes it necessary for them to do much, or anything, to prove their greatness. Their greatness is built on the tie to mother. Consequently, for such men their whole sense of self-worth is bound up with the relationship to the women who admire them unconditionally and without limits. Their greatest fear is that they may fail to obtain the admiration of a woman they have chosen, since such failure would threaten the basis of their narcissistic self-evaluation. But while they are afraid of women, this fear is less obvious than in the previous case, because the picture is dominated by their narcissistic attitude that gives the impression of warm manliness. . . .⁵⁷

Fromm points out that in this situation, as in all cases of intense fixation, allegiance to mother must be total. It is tabu to have any real interests or loyalties which would diminish or minimize the son's relationship to his mother.⁵⁸ Such men who develop some mild interest outside of the mother's orbit suffer from guilt over such defection.⁵⁹

~~INCESTUOUS SYMBIOSIS~~

The most disorganizing level of mother fixation Fromm calls "incestuous symbiosis." In defining the word symbiosis Fromm says:

. . . There are various degrees of symbiosis, but they all have in common one element: the symbiotically attached person is part and parcel of the "host" person to whom he is attached. He cannot live without that person, and if the relationship is threatened he feels extremely anxious and frightened. . . .⁶⁰

Those who already have a schizophrenic orientation may experience a breakdown on the occasion of the loss of such a person.⁶¹

In saying that the symbiotically attached person cannot live without the "host" person Fromm explains that these two do not necessarily have to live together or always be together physically. They

⁵⁷Ibid. ⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 104.

⁶¹Ibid.



may see each other only occasionally, or the host person may no longer be alive, in which case the bond between them is maintained by the receiving person in fantasy. But the attached person merges in feeling with the host person to such an extent that it may be impossible for him not to see himself as an integral part of this stronger individual.⁶² The more extreme the form of symbiosis, the less possible is a clear distinction between two persons.⁶³ For this reason Fromm says it is misleading to use the word "dependency" in speaking of the symbiotically attached person because it implies that there are two separate individuals involved, when in fact, each one is leaning heavily on the other. The mark of the symbiotically attached person, however, is his constant emotional attachment to the other.⁶⁴ He may have a varying range of feelings about the host person at times seeing himself as superior, or at other times inferior, or even equal to that person. Fromm sees the mother-fetus relationship as best exemplifying the emotional involvement of incestuous symbiosis. Two human beings are participating in a situation but they act as one.⁶⁵

With this emotional arrangement each person is symbiotically attached to the other. "In this case," says Fromm, "one is dealing with a folie a deux which makes the two unaware of their folie because their shared system constitutes reality for them."⁶⁶ In the third and deepest level of fixation, unconscious desires of returning to the womb appear in dreams. The wish is expressed in fears of drowning or

62Ibid.

63Ibid.

64Ibid.

65Ibid., pp. 104-105.

66Ibid., p. 105.



being swallowed by the earth. In this wish or fear the symbiotically attached person desires to avoid all of life's anxieties, risks, and struggles, giving up any identity which he may have in order to resume his original unity with nature. Such a wish, of course, is in direct conflict with the wish to live because regression to the womb is a complete retreat from life.⁶⁷

In this third level of psychopathology Fromm writes:

What I have been trying to say is that the tie to mother, both the wish for her love and the fear of her destructiveness, is much stronger and more elementary than Freud's "Oedipus tie," which he thought was based on sexual desires. . . .⁶⁸

But a conscious perception of this problem seems scarcely to comprehend the depths of the unconscious pathological complexities and reality of it. The words "love," "dependence," and "symbiotic fixation" are used to try to convey aspects of the problem, but "all these words are pallid in comparison with the power of the experience behind them"⁶⁹

It is equally difficult to comprehend the depth of the fear of the mother which the symbiotically fixated has in his mind. We use words to try to describe their feelings, words such as "dependence" and "fear," but again, these really do not convey the depth of horror and terror known to a person locked into his experience with incestuous symbiosis.⁷⁰

DREAMS

If words which we use are inadequate to describe deep emotional upheavals and shocks it is probably because our everyday language is largely limited to what is allowed to pass through the censoring filter

⁶⁷Ibid. ⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 106.

in our minds. Fromm contends that:

. . . The language which is adequate to describe the real experience is that of dreams of symbols in mythology and religion: If I dream that I am drowning in the ocean (accompanied by a feeling of mild dread and bliss); or if I dream that I am trying to escape from a lion that is about to swallow me, then indeed, I dream in a language which corresponds to what I really experience. . . .⁷¹

Fromm gives examples of dreams which illustrate different problems and levels of mother fixation.

1. A man dreams that he is alone on the beach. An elderly woman comes and smiles at him. She indicates to him that he may drink from her breasts.

2. A man dreams that a powerful woman has seized him, holds him over a deep ravine, drops him, and he falls to his death.

3. A woman dreams that she is meeting a man; at that moment a witch appears and the dreamer is deeply frightened. The man takes a gun and kills the witch. She (the dreamer) runs away, being afraid of being discovered and beckons to the man to follow her.⁷²

In interpreting these dreams Fromm sees the man in the first dream trying to fulfill his wish for a mother who will feed and take care of him. The second dream shows a man who is being destroyed by a terrifying amazon, while in the last dream the mother-witch threatens her daughter with destruction for daring to love a man.⁷³ Only by destroying her mother can she obtain the freedom to fulfill her desire.⁷⁴

Dream images of caves, submarines, tombs, and dreams of plunging into the depths of the ocean express the unyielding longing to return to mother.⁷⁵ The passion for a return to the womb, to mother earth, or to the tomb, can be so consuming that suicide will be the expected outcome if this unbroken regression continues.⁷⁶

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 103.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Fromm, TSS., p. 44.

⁷⁶Suzuki, Fromm, and De Martino, ZBAP., p. 89.



FIXATION TO FATHER

Fromm writes at length about mother fixation, but he does not neglect the question of possible fixation to the father. Of this problem he states:

. . . Indeed, there is no doubt that such fixation exists both among men and among women; in the latter case it sometimes is blended with sexual desires. Yet it seems that fixation to father never reaches the depth of fixation to mother-family-blood-earth. . . .⁷⁷

It is possible, Fromm admits, for the father also to have assumed a mothering role, but the part he plays in the child's life is quite different from the mother because it is the mother who is life, care, and protection to the child. Mother is the great giver of life, but she can also possibly stop giving and thereby take life away. The mother-fixated person has been greatly impressed with her power and finds it difficult to relinquish his wishes for her constant care.⁷⁸

The father represents love that is conditioned by obedience to his standards of law and order. He demands attention to social obligations, and he hands out rewards for good performance and punishment for bad.⁷⁹ The person who is father-fixated has a much better chance of gaining love and reward by fulfilling the requirements, ". . . but the euphoric feeling of complete and unconditional love, certainty, and protection is rarely present in the experience of the father-bound person. . . ."⁸⁰ and the depth and intensity of regression is rarely found in this fixation as it is in mother-fixation.⁸¹

⁷⁷Fromm, THOM., p. 103.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 103-104.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 104.



There is clinical evidence which would indicate that strong ties with the father are made in an attempt to avoid the deeper and more serious regression to mother. Rites of initiation in many cultures aim to cut the mother ties, but these efforts only succeed in establishing heavier ties with the father or the male group.⁸²

DISTORTIONS IN PERCEPTION

Fromm underscores the point that

. . . the pathology of incestuous fixation depends obviously on the levels of regression. In the most benign cases there is hardly any pathology to speak of except, perhaps, a slight overdependence on the fear of women. The deeper the level of regression the more intense are both the dependence and the fear. On the most archaic level, both dependence and fear have reached a degree which conflicts with sane living. . . .⁸³

Man's reason and objectivity are also subject to distortions according to the depth and complexity of his regression.⁸⁴

The person involved in mother fixation, like the narcissistic person, must try to bend reality to suit the needs of maintaining his pathology. Fromm writes:

. . . If I fail to cut the umbilical cord, if I insist on worshipping the idol of certainty and protection, then the idol becomes sacred. It must not be criticized. If "mother" cannot be wrong, how can I judge anyone else objectively if he is in conflict with mother or disapproved by her? This form of impairment of judgment is much less obvious when the object of fixation is not mother but the family, the nation, or the race. . . .⁸⁵

This distortion of truth becomes much more confusing to the individual

⁸²Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, Social Character In a Mexican Village (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 77. (The title of this book is hereafter referred to as SCMV.)

⁸³Fromm, THOM., p. 106. ⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid. *



when the process is blessed and the fixations themselves are given great commendation by the national religious institutions to which they attach themselves. Biased judgments and lies become acceptable to the fixated individual because they are perfectly acceptable and shared by the larger fixated group.⁸⁶

A second distortion of perception which is part of the pattern of incestuous fixation is the inability of the fixated person to experience the individuality and humanness of another person. "Only those who share the same blood and soil," says Fromm, "are felt to be human; the 'stranger' is a barbarian."⁸⁷ The fixated man must remain a stranger to himself because he permits himself no contact with others who are not already caught up in the same collective sickness. Thus, the capacity of the fixated man to love is greatly impaired or at times completely destroyed "in accordance with the degree of regression. . . ."⁸⁸

The person who is mother-fixated, and who must give his loyalty and devotion to her or to the larger surrogate mothering groups, is scarcely free to be himself or to hold beliefs which are not supportive and approved by the larger group. Such a man ". . . cannot be open to the world, nor can he embrace it. He is always in the prison of the motherly racial-national-religious fixation."⁸⁹ Such a man is never fully born until he breaks away from mother, and all of the imprisoning variations of incestuous fixation. Unfortunately, those who are strongly tied to mother do not wish to recognize that such a condition exists, and so they rationalize their attachment claiming to see it as duty,

⁸⁶Ibid. ⁸⁷Ibid., p. 107.

⁸⁸Ibid. ⁸⁹Ibid.



gratitude, or love.⁹⁰ A similar rationalization is used if it is the clan or nation which is the object of incestuous devotion.⁹¹

SYNDROME OF DECAY

In his book, The Heart of Man, Fromm presents his most extensive discussion of incestuous ties; he also deals with two other destructive psychological patterns of life: necrophilia (love of death), and malignant narcissism. When these three separate orientations converge they ". . . form the basis for the most vicious and dangerous form of human orientation."⁹²

"Necrophilia" means "love of the dead," and although the term is applied to a perversion in which a dead woman's body is used for sexual purposes, it may refer to a morbid wish to have contact with the dead. Fromm uses the word "necrophilia" to denote a hatred of life and a love of death.⁹³ In further defining necrophilia Fromm states:

. . . The person with the necrophilous orientation is one who is attracted to and fascinated by all that is not alive, all that is dead; corpses, decay, feces, dirt. Necrophiles are those people who love to talk about sickness, about burials, about death. They come to life precisely when they can talk about death. . . .⁹⁴

The necrophilous man always looks backward to a past for which he expresses feelings of sentimentality. He has a cold personality demanding law and order; he keeps his distance from people. As a lover of death he is fascinated with the power to kill. He loves force and the use of it. "For him the greatest achievement of man is not to give life,

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 106. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 107.

⁹²Ibid., p. 23. ⁹³Ibid., p. 39.

⁹⁴Ibid.

but to destroy it; the use of force is not a transitory action forced upon him by circumstances--it is a way of life."⁹⁵ Further, the necrophilous man is a lover of night and darkness. He seeks to drive life from his presence and to treat human beings as if they were mechanical things to be possessed and manipulated.⁹⁶

Another of the vicious and crippling orientations which Fromm discusses is malignant narcissism. The highly narcissistic person finds reality only within himself. "The infant," says Fromm, "is extremely narcissistic because originally there is no outside reality from which he feels himself differentiated."⁹⁷ The insane person's situation is not too different from that of the infant, but for the infant there has not been enough relation to the outside world for it to become real, while the insane person no longer finds reality in contact with the outside world.⁹⁸ Fromm states that "psychosis is a state of absolute narcissism, one in which the person has broken all connection with reality outside, and has made his own person the substitute for reality."⁹⁹

The narcissistic person, in trying to handle his fear and loneliness, makes himself into his own reality. "If he is the world, there is no world outside which can frighten him; if he is everything, he is not alone; consequently, when his narcissism is wounded he feels threatened in his whole existence."¹⁰⁰ The narcissistic man has glorified and exalted everything that is his--his self image, his house,

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 40

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

⁹⁷Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm, p. 69.

⁹⁸Fromm, THOM., p. 65. ⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 66-67.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 75.



his knowledge, his people--all of these are his objects to which he gives strong narcissistic attachment.¹⁰¹ Fromm speaks of the strength of this striving:

Narcissism is a passion the intensity of which in many individuals can only be compared with sexual desire and the desire to stay alive. In fact, many times it proves stronger than either. Even in the average individual in whom it does not reach such intensity, there remains a narcissistic love which appears to be almost indestructible. . . .¹⁰²

The most serious problem involved in this orientation is narcissistic man's effort to bend reality to suit his own needs thereby defying rational judgment. Narcissistic judgment is terribly distorted because it is not based on rational objective evaluation. If something is considered good or valuable it is so because it belongs to the narcissistic man--it is his possession.¹⁰³

An ever more dangerous pathological element in narcissism is the emotional reaction to criticism of any narcissistically cathected position. Normally a person does not become angry when something he has done or said is criticized, provided the criticism is fair and not made with hostile intent. The narcissistic person, on the other hand, reacts with intense anger when he is criticized. He tends to feel that the criticism is a hostile attack, since by the very nature of his narcissism he cannot imagine that it is justified. . . .¹⁰⁴

Necrophilia and narcissism, like incestuous fixation, range in levels of regression from benign forms to the archaic forms of psychopathology.¹⁰⁵ In the nonmalignant forms Fromm sees no serious distortions in the personality which affects rational judgment or the capacity for love. To illustrate, Fromm uses an example from recent history--Franklin

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 74.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 114.



D. Roosevelt. "He was moderately mother-fixed, moderately narcissistic, and strongly biophilous person."¹⁰⁶ Adolf Hitler, however, seems to have exhibited classic, textbook-like examples of all three of the deadly orientations: necrophilia, malignant narcissism, and incestuous symbiosis. The more malignant these orientations are, the more they tend to converge.¹⁰⁷

. . . First of all there is a close affinity between incestuous fixation and narcissism. Inasmuch as the individual has not yet fully emerged from mother's womb or mother's breasts, he is not free to relate to others or to love others. He and his mother (as one) are the object of narcissism. This can be seen most clearly where the personal narcissism has been transformed into group narcissism. There we find very clearly incestuous fixation blended with narcissism. It is this particular blend which explains the power and the irrationality of all national, racial, religious and political fanaticism.¹⁰⁸

On the most primitive and regressive levels incestuous symbiosis and narcissism merge with necrophilia. The man who clings tenaciously to mother gives full narcissistic attention to this fixation, eventually having his craving to return to the womb become an intense desire for the ultimate necrophilous passion of death culminating in suicide.¹⁰⁹

Fromm sees this blending of the three deadly orientations as forming the "syndrome of decay," which in combination, ". . . prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction, and to hate for the sake of hate."¹¹⁰ The man in whose life this terrible combination has occurred is evil indeed, because he turns his energies away from salutary forms of human development and worships the sources of alienation, sickness, and death.¹¹¹

In considering the "syndrome of decay" Fromm points to Hitler,

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 108. ¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. ¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 23. ¹¹¹Ibid., p. 108.



as we have already noted, as the best-documented example of this malignant orientation because he was tremendously interested in death and destruction, and as a malignant narcissist, saw reality only within himself. His deep incestuous fixation was revealed in his passionate, fanatical devotion to the race and people whom he regarded as undefiled in origin. In Mein Kampf he affirmed that he wanted to save the Germanic race from poisoned blood which was caused by syphilis and the pollution of the Jews.¹¹²

Hitler is by no means the only example of the "syndrome of decay." The combination of violence, hate, racism, and fanatical, narcissistic nationalism can be found in the lives of many who really believe in war and destruction. Those who have such an orientation will tend to cover their destructive purpose with talk of honor of country, loyalty, and duty. Only those who are the sickest and the most imbalanced may express their real intent.¹¹³

In times of war, when humane and civilized order and communication have ceased, those who have repressed intense fury are no longer forced to pretend and they unleash their lethal desires. "Indeed, war and an atmosphere of violence," says Fromm, "is the situation in which the person with the 'syndrome of decay' becomes fully himself."¹¹⁴ Even though this syndrome probably affects a minority of the population, Fromm believes that the man who is so infected is a dangerous menace during potentially explosive times because he does not begin to realize the power of his own destructive motives, nor do others have insight into

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 111.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 110.