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It's All in Dreams

THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales and Myths. By Erich Fromm. 263 pp. New York: Rinehart & Co. \$3.50.

By **ROLLO MAY**

ONE of the most devastating aspects of modern man's psychological and spiritual disunity is that he has forgotten the most basic and universal human language. This, the language of symbols, is that in which we speak to ourselves at night in dreams. And it is the language of myths, in which societies pass on their deepest wisdom from culture to culture and age to age.

Since the loss of this language has alienated man from wide areas within himself, and has isolated him to a great extent from the human life, it has been part of the cause of modern man's continuous anxiety. It also has had dangerous results, for if people suppress their fantasy and dream life for long, it tends to burst forth in such neurotic and destructive forms as the belief in Hitler's mythology in Germany or the faith in the magic of engrams and flying saucers in our own day.

The purpose of this important book by Erich Fromm, the chairman of the Faculty of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, is to point the way for the relearning of this language. This is Fromm's third book since his "Escape from Freedom" in 1941, and its appearance re-emphasizes the fact that he is one of the most constructive and important figures writing in psychoanalysis today.

THROUGHOUT history, until our era, people accepted the fact that dreams are important communications of the person with himself. Socrates held that dreams are the voice of conscience, and foolish is the man who does not take this voice seriously.

But in the modern age "myths were supposed to be naïve fabrications of the pre-scientific mind," Fromm writes, and continues:

Dreams fared even worse in the judgment of modern enlightenment. They were considered to be plain senseless, and unworthy of the attention of grown-up men, who were busy with such important matters as building machines and considered themselves "realistic" because they saw nothing but the reality of things they could conquer and manipulate; realists who have a special word for each type of automobile, but only one word, "love," to express the most varied kinds of effective experience.

Freud rediscovered that all dreams are meaningful and significant, and formulated his famous theory that they are expressions of the repressed irrational, infantile and animal side of man. Jung, on the other hand, held that dreams repre-

sent man's highest intuitions.

Fromm believes that both these theories are partially correct, and that dreams represent both the "worst" and "best" in man. He holds that "we are not only less reasonable and less decent in our dreams but we are also more intelligent, wiser and capable of better judgment when we are asleep than when we are awake."

Proceeding to myths, Fromm presents fascinating interpretations of Little Red Riding Hood, the Oedipus trilogy, the sabbath ritual, and stories as diverse as Kafka's novels and Jonah. Jonah, for example, is the parable of one who could not love his fellowmen because he was always crawling back into the "womb," symbolized by the ship's belly, falling asleep and being in the whale.

This is an introductory book, written without technical jargon and with Fromm's customary faculty for putting profound ideas simply. Though he promises a later, more advanced work on dreams, the professional readers will get here a great deal from the broad, syn-



thesizing compass of this book and its many stimulating insights.

There has been a crying need for exactly this kind of book for the intelligent layman, to support him in his intuition that dreams do not need to be surrendered into the foreign land of esoteric codes, and to guide him in reaping some of the wisdom and insights from his dreams, and in using them as aids to self-understanding. The remarkable value of this timely book lies in the fact that it shows how men may learn again to communicate with themselves and their fellows.

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A consulting psychologist, Mr. May is the author of "The Meaning of Anxiety."