

## Erich Fromm's Art of Dream Interpretation\*

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IT IS always a pleasure to read what Fromm writes. He is a very erudite man, has a highly readable style, and makes excellent use of illustrative material, both from ancient writings and from case histories. In this volume he makes the grand tour of the world of the unconscious, beginning with a simple but clear exposition of the nature of symbols, without which understanding the whole subject would be impossibly obscure, and ending with a well developed thesis as to the significance of the Oedipus story, which he regards as concerned primarily with the eternal rivalry between father and son, rather than as a dramatic portrayal of incestuous conflict.

In developing his argument his main thesis is that human society in its beginnings was basically matriarchal and that the primitive deities wielding the greatest power were female. From the beginning of time the struggle for power between the sexes could be traced through the changing balance of power between male and female deities. As the greater physical

strength of the male eventually brought woman into a state of subjugation the matriarchal order gave way and was succeeded by the patriarchal state. The all-powerful goddesses were now muted, and relegated to a secondary position, while all-powerful male deities became the object of veneration and worship.

In a brief but fascinating account of the Babylonian myth of creation he shows how this change in the relationship of the sexes was symbolized. The great mother Tiamat is overthrown by a conspiracy and victorious rebellion of male gods. The leader Marduk has to pass a test before he is acknowledged as supreme god. He must destroy a garment by a word of command, and must then command it to be restored. Thus the one power through which woman had attained supremacy, the power of natural creation, gave way before the power of the word, the power of creative thought. He points out that whereas Freud has emphasized envy of male-ness ('penis-envy') as a common source of neurosis in women, envy of female-ness ('pregnancy envy') is a common finding among the unconscious conflicts of men. He interprets the 'Little Red Cap' story (*Little Red Riding Hood*) as a fairy story which ends in the triumph of woman over man. He

points out that just as Athena sprang from the head of Zeus, so Eve was formed from Adam's rib. Eve, the Mother, could no longer rule over men; henceforth her enslavement of man must be punished by her being placed in subjection to him.

In the course of his grand tour Fromm gives an excellent exposition of the nature of dreams and a critical review of the differences between Freud and Jung in their approach to dream analysis, and states his own position in this extremely subtle and delicate field of inquiry. He comes sharply to the defense of Freud, as being far from "representative of the sensuous, frivolous, immoral Viennese atmosphere, but, on the contrary, a Puritan who could write so freely about sex and love because he had put them in a herbarium."

He attributes to Jung and Silberer, whom he calls "two of the most gifted of Freud's students" the credit for "having early recognized the one weakness in Freud's dream interpretation." They both assumed that each dream had to be understood in both its anagogic (prospective) and analytic (retrospective) meaning. After Freud and Jung parted company Jung abandoned much of Freud's technique and constructed his own concept of the dream as the expression of the wisdom of the unconscious, rather than as a means of expressing forbidden wishes in a disguised form—the 'wish-fulfilment' function of the dream.

FROMM agrees with Jung "that the unconscious mind is capable at times of assuming an intelligence and purposiveness which are superior to actual conscious insight." He disagrees, however, with his assumption that this fact is a "basic religious

phenomenon, and that the voice which speaks in our dreams is not our own but comes from a source transcending us." Fromm, like most psychoanalysts, believes that "what we think in our sleep is our thinking, and that there are good reasons for the fact that the influences we are submitted to in our waking life have in many respects a stultifying effect on our intellectual and moral accomplishments." Fromm states as his assumption that "dreams can be the expression both of the lowest and most irrational, and of the highest and most valuable functions of our minds." He says that he will try to show that the three theories of the dream: as an exclusively irrational production, as an exclusively rational production, or as being either of the two, are to be found in the history of dream interpretation far back in the past.

In attempting this difficult task Fromm makes free use of quotations from Freud and Jung, and puts his own critical faculty to work in discussing their several interpretations. While showing the fullest appreciation of their several contributions to the understanding of dreams he seems especially inclined to emphasize the idea that a higher order of reason is sometimes more evident in the dream than in the waking state. To this reviewer this would seem to be a highly questionable hypothesis. Such a division of powers between the unconscious and conscious mind seems arbitrary. What would seem a more tenable hypothesis is that the apparently higher order of reasoning that seems to appear when a dream gives new insight arises from the fact that there is less interference during sleep both from preoccupation with problems of immediate adjustment to the outside world, and from the defences against

\**The Forgotten Language*, published by Rinehart & Company, Inc., \$3.50





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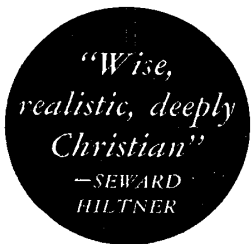
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free thinking which have been built up through years of struggle.

In his extremely interesting discussion of the Oedipus story, he de-emphasizes the incestuous conflicts which Freud found so significant in order to call attention to the power struggle between father and son, and relates the significance of this trilogy to the cultural struggle between Sophocles and the Sophists. His description of the Sophists might as well be a description of the Nazis or the Politburo. It would seem that in emphasizing this struggle between father and son as the essential plot in the Oedipus trilogy he is building a hypothesis which is somewhat one-sided.

This remarkable trilogy holds in its dramatic artistry such a wealth of hu-

man conflicts, and of the contradictory passions which underlie them, that to single out one aspect of the plot as *the* significant one does little justice to the genius, of Sophocles. Rather, it would seem, does it give the author the opportunity to use this aspect of the Oedipus tragedy to bring ex post facto evidence for a hypothesis which he finds intriguing—the hypothesis that the chief source of trouble in the world is the triumph of man over woman, of the power of the word over the power of love, of the need to subordinate individual creativity to the requirements of authority. This book is a rewarding experience in any case. It carries within its covers a strong argument for the principles of humanism, of personal dignity, and of the worth of mankind.



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