



for assistance in gaining the “feel” for the schizophrenic process and language, as well as a stimulant for further study in the interrelatedness of psychology and religion, particularly in the field of mental illness. For members of the theological profession, Boisen convincingly points out the value of the study of mental illness and of clinical training in aiding the minister’s understanding of his parishioners. For the thoughtful layman this volume can be a searching and stimulating experience.

ROBERT G. KVARNES

THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF DREAMS, FAIRY TALES AND MYTHS. By ERICH FROMM. New York, Rinehart & Co., 1951; 263 pp.

Modern man has forgotten the language of dreams, or chosen to disregard it, and from this observation Fromm takes the provocative title of his book. The language of dreams as well as myths is symbolic; as Fromm says, “Symbolic language is a language in which inner experiences, feelings and thoughts are expressed as if they were sensory experiences, . . . a language which has a different logic . . . in which not time and space are the ruling categories but intensity and association.” In a significant introduction, Fromm points out that modern “enlightened” man has dismissed symbolic language as found in dreams and myths as not “realistic,” “naive fabrications of the prescientific mind,” and “plain senseless”; and he suggests that this is because many dreams make us anxious—they “do not fit the person we are sure we are during the daytime.” Fromm considers the change in this attitude in recent decades—stimulated by the work of Freud, though somewhat crippled by the “dogmatism and rigidity that has resulted from the claims of various psychoanalytic schools”—to be heartening, for he believes that “symbolic language is the one foreign language that each of us must learn. Its understanding brings us in touch with one of the most significant sources of wisdom, that of the

myth, and it brings us in touch with the deeper layers of our own personality.”

According to Fromm, we can only describe subjective experiences in symbols; that is, something outside ourselves symbolizes something inside ourselves. When a symbol is defined as such, Fromm asks the crucial question of himself: “What is the specific connection between the symbol and that which it symbolizes?” In answering this question, he differentiates between three types of symbols. The *conventional* symbol is used in everyday language; for example, the word table, the sound “table” or the letters T-A-B-L-E, stand for the thing table that we see, touch, and use. There is no intrinsic relationship between the symbol and that which it symbolizes, for such a symbol is learned from the cultural milieu and is held in common by all members of a given culture. Similarly, the *accidental* symbol has no intrinsic relationship with that which it symbolizes; it is completely individual, being learned through a particular experience. For example, a specific city might carry with it symbolically a specific mood that a person once experienced in that city. The *universal* symbol is one in which the relationship with that which it symbolizes is intrinsic. The universal symbol is derived from the fact that certain physical phenomena suggest by their very nature certain emotional and mental experiences; for example, fire can symbolize power, energy, light, and grace. Universal symbols do not need to be learned, and they are not restricted to any segment of the human race; there are of course “dialects” based on cultural differences. Universal symbols can have several different meanings because physical phenomena may contain several emotional qualities; for example, the sea can be either powerful and destructive, or eternal and confident.

Perhaps one of Fromm’s most important contributions in this book is his emphasis on the constructive insightful potentialities of dreams; this is a wider perspective than Freud’s view that dreams are primarily the wish fulfillment of consciously unacceptable desires. “Dream-



ing," Fromm says, "is meaningful and significant expression of any kind of mental activity under the condition of sleep." Sleep suspends man's need to act and react with the objective world, and consequently frees man for the fullest expression of his inner self. Fromm understands the conscious and unconscious as two poles of human existence. In sleep the unconscious is given free rein for self-expression. In this way, dreams concern themselves constructively with insight into our relation to others or theirs to us, value judgments, predictions, and intellectual operations superior to those in the waking state. "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."

Fromm provides a useful analysis of his approach to the understanding of dreams as compared to Freud's and Jung's. For Freud, dreams are the wish fulfillment of the irrational and unacceptable desires of the instinctual self, the expression of which is possible only because the super-ego "censor" is relaxed during sleep; and dreams serve the primary purpose of protecting the sleep. He regards the symbolic language of dreams as a "secret code" designed to foil the "censor" and dream interpretation as the work of deciphering this secret code. Jung understands dreams as the expression of the wisdom of the unconscious, which is a source of revelation transcending waking life. While the present development of the understanding of dreams and symbols is greatly indebted to both of these men, Fromm agrees only partially with each, and he considers them both too dogmatic and one-sided in insisting upon their particular interpretations of the phenomena of dreams.

Fromm also reviews the history of dream interpretation from classical and biblical antiquity to nineteenth-century philosophy, presenting a most stimulating and varied selection of excerpts. He finds that "one of the two views that dreams are either manifestations of our animal nature . . . or of our most rational powers

. . . is held by most students of dreams. Some of them believe, like Freud, that all dreams are of an irrational nature; others, like Jung, that they are all revelations of higher wisdom. But many students share the view expressed throughout this book—that dreams partake of both, of our irrational *and* of our rational nature, and that it is the aim of the art of dream interpretation to understand when our better self and when our animal nature makes itself heard in the dream."

While the art of dream interpretation requires knowledge, talent, practice, and patience, Fromm believes that some basic principles can be crystallized, and attempts to convey these through the examination of a variety of illustrative dreams. The fundamental problem in dream interpretation is "finding out in which key to interpret the dream"; that is, whether the dream is "expressive of an irrational wish and its fulfillment, of a plain fear or anxiety, or of an insight into inner or outer forces and occurrences." Fromm poses other relevant questions: Do we need the associations of the dreamer? What is the relation of the dream to recent events? What is the relation of the dream to the dreamer's total personality, to the fears and wishes rooted in his character?

And finally Fromm interprets a myth, a fairy tale, a cultural ritual, and a novel to illustrate how their symbolic language parallels that of dreams, and to show how this opens up new riches in the understanding of the human mind and experience. He presents rather detailed interpretations of the Oedipus myth, the Babylonian myth of Creation (*Enuma Elish*), the fairy tale of *Little Red-Cap* (Little Red Riding Hood), the ritual of the Old Testament Sabbath, and Kafka's *The Trial*.

As a clergyman who feels that much of the difficulty we have with religion is a difficulty with the use of symbolic language, the forgotten language, I approached this book with anticipation. But I must confess to a certain disappointment. In discussing this book with a group of related professional workers, I



found that this disappointment seemed to be generally shared.

Fromm vacillates between three foci throughout the book. This reviewer's disappointment may be caused by the very vacillation, or by the fact that no one of the three foci seems sufficiently developed. At one moment the book seems to be addressed (admittedly in an introductory way) to those analysts who are concerned with dream interpretation as a specific therapeutic tool. At another moment the book seems to be addressed to a more general audience who might be interested in the use and interpretation of symbolic language in dreams, myths, rituals, and so on. And finally this book also concerns itself with the large field of general semantics—that is, the role of symbolism in memory, communication, and the whole of human living, as the capacity to abstract in varying degrees both objective and subjective experiences. The difficulty with the foci perhaps lies in the fact that this book is based on lectures delivered both to postgraduate students in training at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry and to undergraduates at Bennington College.

One of the major theses which Fromm develops—that is, the nature of the unconscious and its implications for the interpretation of dreams—is a thesis which is at the same time much more inclusive and much more exclusive than the scope of this book. The nature and development of the unconscious is a much bigger subject in the literature of psychoanalysis than simply its implications for the interpretation of dreams. On the other hand the subject of symbolic language and its meaning regarding the relationships and communications of human beings is a much larger subject than the understanding of its use through the unconscious.

I feel that the distinctions between "conventional," "accidental," and "universal" symbols, while perhaps of value for descriptive purposes, are not particularly applicable in the actual use of symbolic language in human experience. In each person, a symbol may contain at the same time a "conventional" (culturally

learned), "accidental" (personal), and "universal" (intrinsic) quality. Is this not the very genesis of symbolic language, and yet the source of much of our difficulty in understanding it?

It must be said that those very factors which contribute to the sense of disappointment in this book are also its strengths, for it is a stimulating and informative book which can be read profitably by both professional and layman. For it deals with a field which though often neglected is very important as we seek to understand ourselves in our world.

ROBERT NACE

PERCEPTION: AN APPROACH TO PERSONALITY. Edited by ROBERT R. BLAKE and GLENN V. RAMSEY. New York, Ronald Press, 1951; viii, 442 pp.

In this book, Blake and Ramsey have brought together the thirteen papers delivered during the 1949-50 Clinical Psychology Symposium at the University of Texas. Viewing perception as the key to the achievement of an understanding of personality and interpersonal relations, the editors, aided by Louis J. Moran, provide an introductory chapter in which they define their use of the term, perception, and trace out the broad conceptual framework about which the text is organized. Inappropriately enough, this definition of the book's single most important concept is lodged in a turgidly-written footnote whose quotation here would give an entirely incorrect impression of the clarity of communication and uniformly good writing that characterizes most of these papers. In essence, the editors define perceptual activities as interactions between the organism and its environment aimed at assuring the organism's effective continuation. These activities or interactions are influenced by two main groups of factors: structural determinants—that is, "the capacity of the given physical structure for detecting stimulus configurations or integrating information about them"; and experiential determinants—that is, "the modifications in the use of the structure which derive from the impact of experience."