

THE FACE OF LOVE

C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1956. 313 pp. \$4.50.

Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1956. 133 pp. \$2.75.

It is interesting to compare C. S. Lewis' new book, *Till We Have Faces* with Erich Fromm's new tract, *The Art of Loving*, since both works deal essentially with the same elusive question, how to achieve the process as well as the sensation of love in one inclusive state. Fromm's title adequately expresses the direction of his text, but Lewis has chosen to subvert his meanings under the guise of myth and fiction. Yet both come to the same conclusion. A Jewish psychologist, and a Christian novelist whose knowledge of medieval Catholic dogma is formidable, say that love comes to those who deny plaguing questions of specious reality; love comes to those who trust one another enough not to ask questions of them or even find time or taste to formulate the questions within themselves.

Fromm's book, which is reaching the best-seller lists (love, as well as sex and religion, always sells), looks deceptive at first glance. It appears to be a "how-to-do-it" book, but Fromm makes it perfectly clear that the practice of love is an individual art; only the theory can be discussed in general esthetic or social

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or personal terms. Fromm claims our society cannot produce a state fostering the right kind of love because capitalistic society *per se* brings in the market value of anything. And so love in a capitalistic society is reduced to "fairness ethics." Each of the partners is "fair" to the other, but, as Fromm points out, "fairness" is an ego-satisfying gesture and not a true concomitant of real love (which would by-pass "fairness" as a totally inconceivable issue). In real love, according to Fromm, consideration of the loved one is the only consideration of the lover.

Fromm also makes the point that capitalistic systems, by their nature, emphasize the value of property, and so a loved one is judged by her property value—that is, will she help the lover in his climb to success, will she be an aid to his social life—how much, in other words, will she contribute? This kind of reasoning, Fromm explains, is also to be found in popular books on religion and social mores, like Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking* and that old chestnut of our father's generation, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*—in which people are urged to make friends with God because He can be an invaluable asset in their business and social contacts. Fromm predicts that such a line of spurious morality will eventually produce neurotics of all of us (if it has not insidiously done so already); only a return to the concept of Biblical love, in which love of one person is important because it represents in essence the love of the whole of humanity, will make full human beings of us again.

Lewis' book deals with the question of love through the use of a complicated allegory: his story is that of two sisters, one beautiful beyond description, the other ugly beyond words.

The interesting turn which Lewis has made in the Cupid-Psyche myth is the characterization of Orual. For Orual causes tragedy by the best of motives and the highest of intents—her love for her sister's honor and safety. Lewis is thus building the same theme as Fromm: love of one person, without a corresponding love of mankind and trust in human beings, will prove



destructive. Only love which can reach out to grasp the whole world can save its lovers.

The theme of Lewis' tale is that Faith and Trust are necessary to guide us: Reason, direct knowledge, can only take us half-way, and to go half-way is to destroy whatever beauty we have. Fromm tells us the same thing; only he calls half-way a perpetual state of neurosis.

Placed alongside one another, on the basis of esthetic merit, it is surprising that *The Art of Loving* comes out ahead. Fromm's book is a simple exercise in writing, it has a singleness of purpose, it is a neat, clean, tidy job. Lewis' book, though at moments brilliant and in the climactic scene between Psyche and Orual, unsurpassable, is lacking in just that semblance of unity and inevitability to make it a really successful work of art. Too many whispers and impressions of other ideas exist about its pages. Lewis' style is reminiscent of Marguerite Yourcenar's *Hadrian's Memoirs*, in which the spirit of the Emperor and his age was conveyed in aphorisms, spare, pure, exact. Lewis' words, however, as he serves them up, do not quite combine into aphorisms. They remain merely serviceable prose. And too, the climax of the book comes too early. Any novel which at least half of is anti-climactic and a summing up, and in which the summing up has no deviation from the expected is bound to become pallid. All in all, while Lewis' book is the more interesting and experimental of the two, it is ultimately the less satisfying, and it is a come-down for those devoted admirers who remember *The Allegory of Love*.

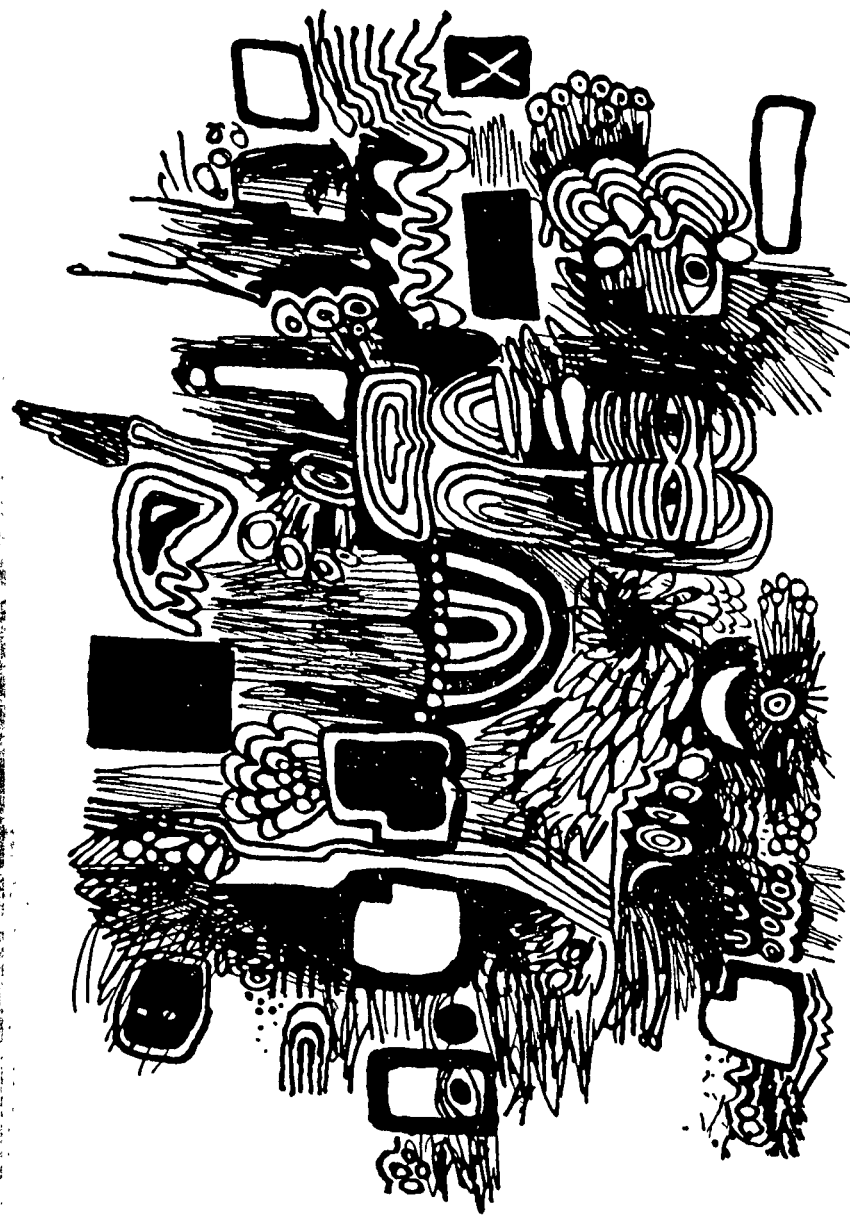


PLATE III